

THE SHIPS OF SALÉ – PART 1

JULY 26, 2020 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

When most people think of seventeenth century pirate ships, they think of the sort of vessel depicted in the image at the top of this post: a large ship with lots of cannon and lots of sails, attacking merchant shipping with a vicious ruthlessness.

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- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 2 January 9, 2023
- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 1 January 2, 2023
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 2 December 25, 2022

Barbary corsairs did indeed sail in large ships of this sort in the seventeenth century—though they rarely made reckless head-on assaults; they were too risky. The corsairs of Salé, however, didn't use ships like this.

Salé—a place to which I have devoted a number of posts in this blog over the years—was, remember, the infamous corsair capital located on the Atlantic coast of Morocco.

Salé was—and is—actually two towns that straddle the mouth of the Bou Regreg River, which flows northwestwards from its headwaters in the Middle Atlas Mountains and empties into the Atlantic Ocean about 155 miles (250 kilometers) south of the Strait of Gibraltar. The settlement on the north bank of the river is today known as Salé, that on the south bank as Rabat (now the capital city of Morocco). The twin modern cities are frequently referred to as a single place—Rabat-Salé. Seventeenth century Europeans, however, tended to refer to the town on the north bank of the river as Old Salé and that on the south bank as New Salé.

It was New Salé, the settlement on the river's south bank, that became the corsair capital.

It was a wild place.

Between 1620 and 1630 alone, the corsairs of New Salé plundered over a thousand European ships. During that same period, the Salé corsair fleet expanded from a handful of vessels to fifty or so, and by the late 1620s and early 1630s, the city contained around 1,500 slaves. The population of Salé during this period was a little over 15,000, so if you found yourself walking along the streets there, every tenth person you met would have been a slave.

- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19, 2022
- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

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- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

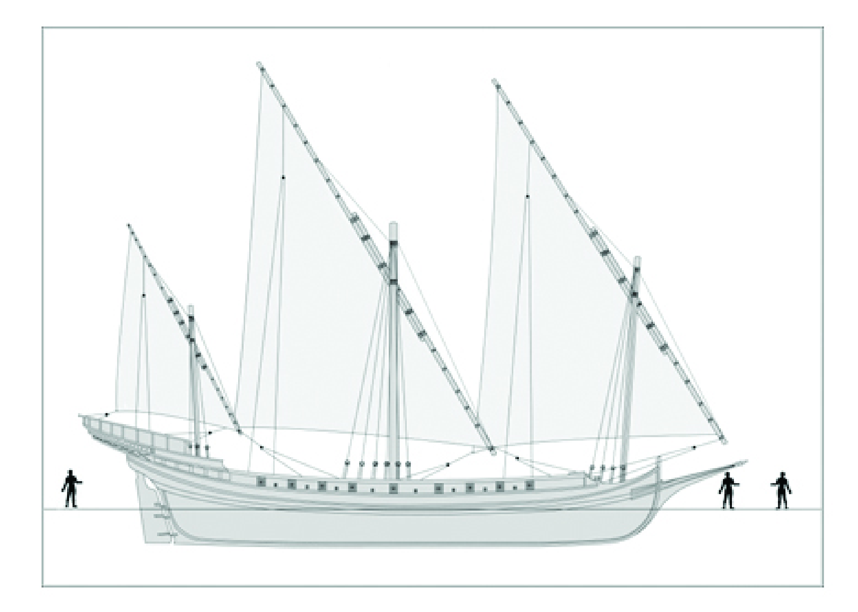
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So the Salé docks, where returning corsair ships unloaded their cargoes of booty and captives, were a busy place. Located a little upriver, they were protected from attack by irate European powers, but this location also presented a problem.

There was a shifting sandbar across the mouth of the Bou Regreg River that restricted access to the Salé port. Ships could only "cross the bar" (as the saying went) at high tide, and even then, only vessels with a draft of less than about 10 feet (3 meters) could reliably make the crossing. This restricted the size of ship the Salé corsairs could use.

So large ships with lots of sails and lots of cannons were of no practical use to them, and they had to employ other, smaller vessels.

One of the vessels they used was the Xebec (also sometimes spelled Chebec). Xebecs could vary from about 80 to about 115 feet (25 to 35 meters) in length, with a draft of 3 to 6.5 feet (1 to 2 meters). They were typically rigged with three lateen sails—triangular sails each set on a single, angled yard that could swing around the mast with the changing direction of the wind—and could mount up to 20 cannon or so, of varying calibers. They were typically equipped with oars for maneuvering close to shore or in windless conditions. See the illustration below. The horizontal line represents the waterline. The image depicts a vessel about 90 feet (27 meters) long, with the human figures shown to scale.



Xebec, to scale

Xebecs were excellent vessels for the sorts of weather/sea/wind conditions typically found in the Mediterranean, and they were equally effective for cruising close to shore pretty much anywhere, but they were not especially good deep water vessels, in large part due to the lateen sails. Because of their shape, such sails were good at gathering wind when there was only a light breeze, and they were very efficient when the ship was sailing "close to the wind"—that is, sailing in the direction from which the wind was blowing. However, when the ship was sailing "before the wind"—with the wind behind it—they were not nearly as efficient. Square-rigged ships—ships equipped with square sails—performed much better when sailing before the wind, and, as a bonus, were safer to handle, since the individual sails were smaller and easier to control, and they did not have to swing around the mast whenever the wind, or the ship, changed direction. For the sorts of long-distance, open-ocean cruises the Salé corsairs began conducting in the early seventeenth century, square-rigged ships were the sensible option.

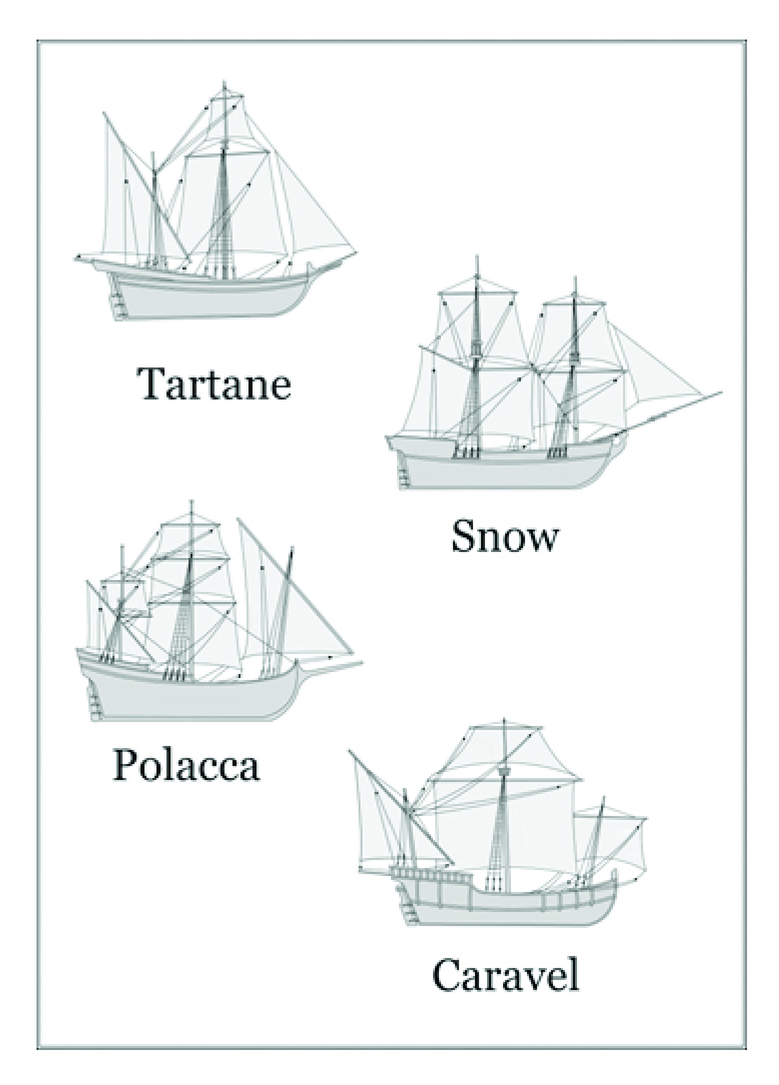
But the shallowness of the Salé harbor, and the challenge of crossing the bar, meant they were

restricted to relatively small square-rigged ships. Salé corsairs made use of a wide variety of vessels—pretty much whatever they could lay their hands on—but the main types seem to have been tartanes, snows, polaccas, and caravels.

There was a bewildering variety of square-rigged sailing ships in the seventeenth century, and it can be difficult to keep them clear if one is not familiar with such things. It helps, perhaps, to think of an analogy with modern automobiles. There are various types of vehicles: sedans, hatchbacks, wagons, minivans, SUVs, pick-up trucks, etc. Within these basic types, there are variations: subcompact, compact, mid-sized, full-sized; gasoline or diesel; two-wheel, four-wheel, or all-wheel drive.

A similar sort of breakdown can be applied to seventeenth century ships. Tartanes, snows, polaccas, and caravels can be thought of as the equivalent of basic car types, like sedans, hatchbacks, wagons, or minivans. Within each type of ship there was considerable variation, but each type had certain defining characteristics, like number of masts or sails, types of sails, etc.

See the illustration below for images of the four types of ships (the images are not to scale relative to each other). Notice that none of these ship types resembles the image of the classic three-masted, square-rigged, multi-sailed, multi-cannoned ship that most people have in mind when they think of seventeenth century pirate ships. These were smaller vessels, in the 60-100 foot (18-30 meter) range, relatively lightly armed for the most part, but fast and nimble.



The four most common types of square-rigged ships used by the Salé corsairs

We'll look at some details of these ships in *The Ships of Sale – Part 2*.

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THE SHIPS OF SALÉ – PART 2

JULY 19, 2020 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

Of the four main types of square-rigged ships employed by the Salé corsairs—tartanes, snows, polaccas, and caravels—one of the most common was the caravel.

Caravels were used extensively, especially by Mediterranean European nations, from the fifteenth

century through to the beginning of the eighteenth. Christopher Columbus's ships were caravels. Bartholomew Diaz, the Portuguese explorer who, in 1487, first rounded the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa and opened the way for the Portuguese exploitation of the East, did so in a caravel. Ferdinand Magellan, whose expedition of 1519-22 was the first successful European circumnavigation of the globe, also used a caravel.

Caravels were employed so widely because they were reliable, easily maneuverable, seaworthy craft. They came in varying sizes, anywhere from about 50 to 100 feet (15 to 30 meters) in length, but most were smaller rather than larger. Traditionally, they could be rigged in two different ways, either as a *caravela latina*, rigged with lateen sails, or as a *caravela rotunda*, rigged with square sails. Eventually, the typical configuration became a compromise *caravela rotunda* set-up: a three-masted rig with the fore and main masts bearing square sails and the mizzen mast (the rear mast) bearing a lateen sail. (The image at the top of this post is of a hybrid *caravela rotunda/latina*, with a polacca in the distant background.)

Columbus's three famous caravals—the *Niña*, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria*—have received a lot of attention over the centuries, and there are quite detailed specs for them. A quick look at these specs can give us a clearer sense of caravel dimensions.

The *Niña* was about 70 feet (a little over 20 meters) long, with a beam (i.e., width) of just under 20 feet (about 6 meters) and a draft (i.e., the measurement of how deep in the water the ship sat) of just under 7 feet (about 2 meters). The *Pinta* was about 75 feet (a little under 23 meters) long, with a beam of a little over 16 feet (about 5 meters) and a draft of just over

- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19, 2022
- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



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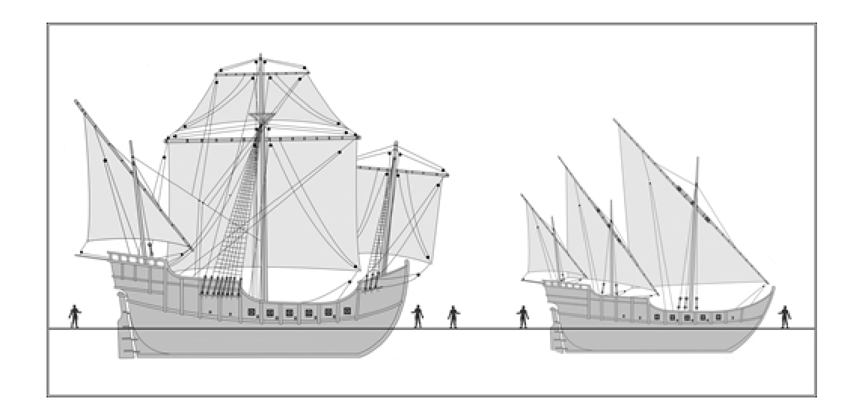
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- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

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7 feet (a little more than 2 meters). The *Santa Maria* was about 85 feet long (26 meters), with a beam of a little more than 26 feet (about 6 meters) and a draft of a little under 10 feet (about 3 meters).

Since the sandbar across the Bou Regreg River had a maximum depth of around twelve feet (3.5 meters) at high tide, caravels in this range of sizes would have all been perfectly acceptable vessels—though a ship the size of the *Santa Maria* would have been about the upper limit.

The illustration below shows two caravels: a *caravela rotunda* on the left, and a slightly smaller *caravela latina* on the right.



The *caravela rotunda* is depicted as about 70 feet (20 meters) long—the size of the *Niña*. The *caravela latina* is about 55 feet (17 meters). The illustration is to scale, showing the sizes of the two ships relative to the men who sailed them. The horizontal line represents the waterline.

When Columbus' little flotilla left the Spanish port of Palos de la Frontera, the *Pinta*, and the *Santa Maria* were rigged as *caravela rotundas*. The *Niña*, however, was rigged as a *caravela latina*. Columbus stopped at the Canary Islands on his way west to have the *Pinta's* ruder repaired and to have the *Niña* re-rigged

as a *rotunda*. So the *caravela rotunda* in the illustration is pretty much what the re-rigged *Niña* would have looked like.

Since the limitations imposed on them by the sand bar across the entrance to their harbor forced the Salé corsairs to use smaller ships rather than larger ones, they were at a disadvantages against larger European merchant vessels or warships. For this reason, Salé corsairs rarely hunted alone: they needed the advantage of numbers.

But the smaller ships also had benefits. The most obvious was speed and agility. They had another benefit, too. They were often equipped with oars. Not only did this give the Salé corsairs an advantage against their European prey in calm conditions—both when attacking and, if necessary, escaping—it also made crossing the bar at Salé safer and easier.

There were some ship building yards in Salé, but the main source of new ships for the Salé corsairs was theft: they not only hunted for slaves and booty; they hunted for ships as well. Smallish merchant ships of this time typically carried a few cannon, but they were seldom heavily armed. The first alteration corsairs made to ships they had captured was to increase the number of cannon they carried. Gunports would be sawn into the gunwales and more cannon installed amidships. A smaller ship could only carry so many cannon, though, usually not more than 6 or 10. This basic armament would be increased by the addition of an equal or greater number of pattareroes, small caliber breech-loading swivel guns, mounted along the ship's gunwales, that fired stone rather than lead or iron shot. The cannon mounted amidships would have been used for broadsides. The pattareroes, mounted along the railings as they were, would have had fields of fire in

pretty much any direction. The result was a ship far more lethal than it had been as a merchantman.

A *caravela rotunda* of the size and type depicted in the illustration above would have been ideal vessel for a Salé corsair. It was small enough to be able to reliably cross the bar into the Salé harbor yet large enough to mount sufficient cannon and hold sufficient crew to be successful as a pirate vessel. Caravels are mentioned in documents from the period of Salé corsairs' ascendancy during the first half of the seventeenth century. No lesser a figure than Jan Janszoon van Haarlem (aka Murad Reis)—who led raids to both Iceland and Ireland—sailed in one.

We should not, however, get too carried away with this 'caravel hypothesis.' Caravels were popular with the Salé corsairs in large part because they were common ships at the time and therefore easy to come across (and steal). Salé corsairs made extensive use of other types of smaller ships as well—pretty much anything they could get their hands on.

In these smaller ships, the Salé corsairs sailed from their harbor in packs, swarming all along the Atlantic littoral of Europe as far north and the English channel (where they specialized in preying on English fishing boats traveling to and from the rich fishing grounds off Iceland and the Grand Banks of Newfoundland).

Such packs were terrifying. For close to two decades, the Salé corsairs raided pretty much wherever they wanted, and nobody was able to stop them, for their small, agile ships were faster and more maneuverable than just about anything else on the sea.

Look, for example, at the following excerpt about a report from Plymouth, on the western tip of the English Channel coast, in August of 1625:

The Mayor and his Brethren of Plymouth are enforced to write by the grievous complaints and daily losses which they receive through the Turks [i.e., the Salé corsairs], who have taken in one year, besides ships, 1,000 mariners. Looe, in Cornwall, has in the last ten days lost 80 mariners, and within the same time there have been 27 ships and 200 persons taken. General fear for the ships from Virginia and Newfoundland. The pirates are 26 or 27 sail strong. Sir Francis Stewart sent out 5 ships against them, but they are far better sailers than the English ships. Within 3 days the English ships left them and returned to Falmouth.

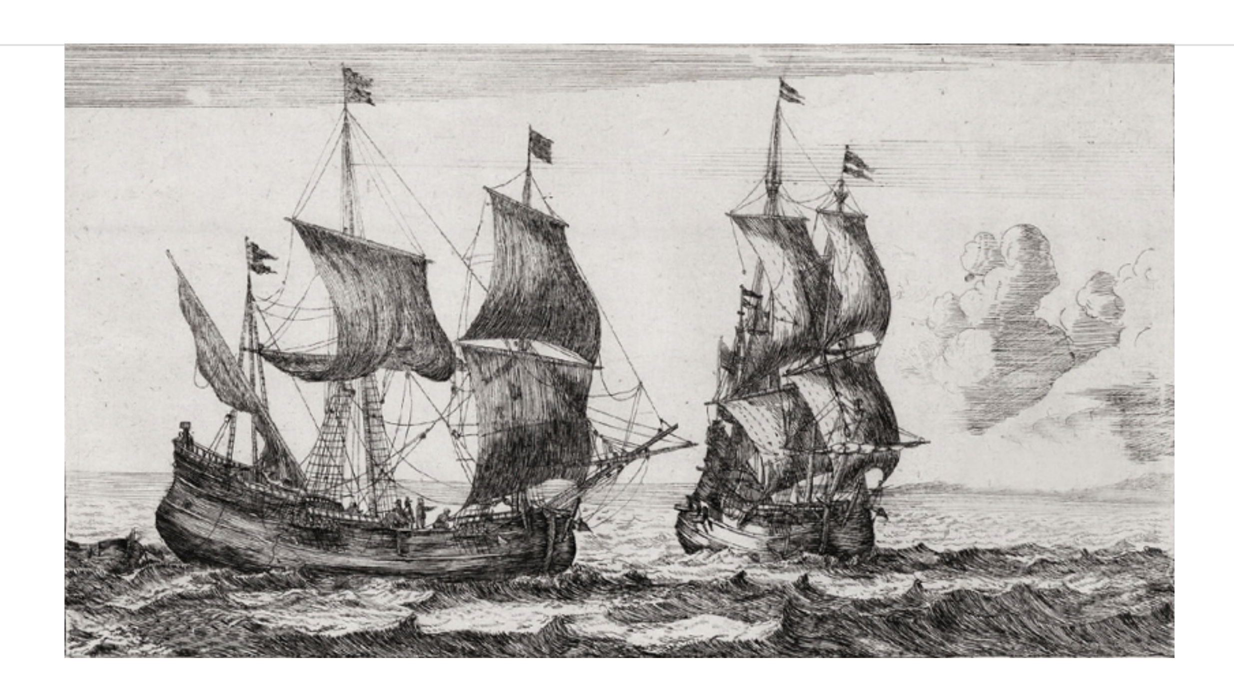
Such was life for the English in the summer of 1625.

For those who may be interested…

The except from the report concerning the Mayor of Plymouth's complaint comes from *Calendar of State Papers Domestic: Charles I, 1625-26*, entry 36: August 12, Plymouth, 1625.

The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson

The story of the Barbary corsair raid on Iceland in 1627



THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 1

SEPTEMBER 2, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

On November 4, 1624, the States-General—the governing body— of the Netherlands sent an official letter of complaint to Moulay Zaydan, the Sultan of Morocco. The text of this letter (originally written in Dutch) contained the following:

Laurens Rutgertsz. and other shipowners and backers of the ship the *Vliegende Hert*, all inhabitants of the Netherlands, have informed us of the following.

These petitioners equipped the said ship to go on a privateering excursion, with a commission from the Prince of Orange, and placed it under the command of a certain Jan Jansen Ververen, with the intention of causing as much damage as possible to our common enemy, the King of Spain, and his supporters.

As a result, the aforementioned captain sailed from Amsterdam on April 5.

The petitioners believed that this captain, according to the promise he made before the noble lords of the Admiralty of Amsterdam, would post a proper and sufficient bail in the Dutch province of Zealand, and that, accordingly, he would, in all honesty, conduct himself appropriately at sea and would not in any way exceed his commission.

But this captain, having gone to sea without leaving any bail as security, as he ought to, had the audacity to sell the cargo of the petitioners' ship under his command to a certain fluyt [a kind of ship] out of Sétubal [a seaport located on the coast of Portugal, just south of Lisbon] with a cargo of salt bound for Dunkirk, where its owners were domiciled.

He was then at sea for some time until he met up with the fluyt again at Salé. There, the fluyt's captain adroitly and craftily unloaded from Ververen's vessel a variety of merchandise that he then put aboard other ships ready to leave this port.


Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

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When all this was accomplished, Ververen received a large sum of money. He then abandoned his ship and his men after having, according to what the petitioners have learned, recommended the said ship by a letter, which he wrote in Spanish, into the custody of the Caïd, or Governor, of Salé, with an express request to hand over this ship only to the petitioners or their agents. Then he snuck off on another ship and disappeared.

So Captain Jan Jansen Ververen managed to pull off a major scam.

He received an official privateering commission authorizing him to attack Spanish shipping—a letter of marque—from Maurits van Oranje, Maurice the Prince of Orange, the *Stadholder* (Head of State) of the Republic of the Netherlands. Having received this letter of marque, he promised that he would post a security deposit. This was standard practice as a way to ensure that privateer captains stayed within the limits of their commission. If they did not, they forfeited their deposit.

Up to this point, Captain Ververen was no different from any Dutch privateer captain, all of whom had to go through this same process before being legally authorized to attack Spanish shipping (the Republic of the Netherlands and Spain were at war at the time).

Captain Ververen's next step, however, launched him on a different course entirely.

He took his ship, the *Vliegende Hert* (the *Flying Deer*) to sea without paying any security deposit. He then quickly sold his cargo—though it is unclear what

exactly that cargo was—to a Dunkirk ship ("a certain fluyt out of Sétubal with a cargo of salt bound for Dunkirk, where its owners were domiciled") and agreed to meet up with that same ship again later at Salé.

Though the letter from the States-General omits mentioning it, Dunkirk, located at this time in the Spanish Netherlands, was a notorious privateer base which the Spanish used to harass Dutch shipping. During the 1620s, Dunkirk privateers—Dunkirkers, as they were known—took an average of over 200 Dutch ships a year. So not only did Captain Ververen illegally sell his cargo, he sold it to an enemy of the Dutch Republic—to one of the very people he was supposed to be to attacking, in fact.

The letter from the States-General also glosses over what happened next.

After meeting the Dunkirker, Captain Ververen took the *Vliegende Hert* out on a summer-long, illegal pirate expedition. After all, the *Vliegende Hert* was equipped and crewed for a privateering cruise, and how else did Captain Ververen manage to arrive in Salé with a brand new load of merchandise ("the fluyt's captain adroitly and craftily unloaded from Ververen's vessel a variety of merchandise")?

That cargo of stolen goods was sold by the Dunkirk Captain at Salé to several local merchants who then shipped it out. This is surely why Captain Ververen and the Dunkirk Captain chose Salé as the port at which to rendezvous. Salé was a corsair capital *par excellence* at this time, and the extensive pirate market there was an excellent place to unload stolen goods—guaranteed no questions asked. Moreover, the Dunkirk Captain had to have been familiar with Salé and its markets in order to conduct matters so

efficiently, so it is unlikely that he was just a random, innocent merchant caught up unexpectedly in all this.

It seems likely that the two captains already knew each other, that they had their plan worked out in advance, and that Captain Ververen's privateering expedition had been a scam right from the start. This would explain why the Dunkirk Captain was willing to go to such lengths to help Captain Ververen sell his booty at Salé.

On the other hand, of course, Captain Ververen might simply have been such a slick salesman that he managed to talk the Dunkirk Captain into believing it would be worth his while to participate in the Salé resale scheme—for surely the Dunkirk Captain received a cut of the profits.

Whatever the particular details might have been, the plan worked, and both men went swanning off with their ill-gotten fortunes and were never heard of again.

Except for the arrangement with the Dunkirk Captain, which he seems to have honored, Captain Ververen behaved like an unprincipled scoundrel throughout. Not only did he renege on the privateering commission he had received, he also abandoned both his ship and his crew, taking all the profits of the summer's plundering with him (minus the share the Dunkirk Captain received).

Captain Ververen did, however, try to return the *Vliegende Hert* to its rightful owners. Perhaps he felt a pang of conscience, or at least a vestigial sense of responsibility. In any case, he wrote to the Caïd (the Governor) of Salé requesting that the *Vliegende Hert* be returned to its Dutch owners. There is no knowing

what might have prompted him to pen such a letter, nor why the Caïd of Salé was so willingly compliant in taking responsibility for the ship, but the end result was that the *Vliegende Hert* ended up moored at the Salé docks during the winter of 1624-25 rather than being abandoned and left to rot or be stolen.

The next step should have been quite simple: the Dutch owners should have made arrangements to have their ship sailed to Holland so that they could recover their stolen property. End of story.

The next step wasn't simple, though, and the *Vliegende Hert*'s winter in the Salé harbor certainly wasn't the end of the story.

To find out what happened to the *Vliegende Hert*, go to *The Affair of the* Vliegende Hert – *Part 2*.

« THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 2
SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 5 »



THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 2

AUGUST 26, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of The Affair of the *Vliegende Hert – Part 1*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read that post before continuing on here.)

During the winter of 1624-25, the *Vliegende Hert* lay moored at the dock in Salé, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco.

Back in the Netherlands, the owners/backers of the ship received word of where she was. They were businessmen who had invested money in a privateering expedition in expectation of making a large profit. So they were, naturally, not at all happy about what had happened. But they were also clearly an influential group, for one of them—Laurens Rutgertsz.—was able to convince the gentlemen of the States-General—the governing body of the Republic of the Netherlands—to intervene directly on their behalf.

And so a second official letter of complaint, dated November 4, 1624, was sent to Moulay Zaydan, the Sultan of Morocco, who was also—at least nominally—the sovereign of Salé. The gentlemen of the States-General concluded their letter with the following:

Laurens Rutgertsz., as the principle interested party, has declared his readiness to act in order to take possession of the vessel and the merchandise which the aforesaid captain has misused, and humbly begged us to write on behalf of him and the other petitioners to Your Majesty, that he may recover his ship and his merchandise. We ask you to have them delivered to the aforesaid Admiralty of Amsterdam, who will dispose of things as is proper.

We have thought it our duty to recommend this affair to Your Majesty most earnestly, praying that the said Laurens Rutgertsz.'s suit should be favorably received, and that you will give orders to the said

- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



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- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022

Caïd [Governor] of Salé so that the said vessel and its goods should be returned to the petitioners. If Your Majesty will do us this very pleasant service, we are quite ready to return aid to you in your own affairs.

The States-General wrote their letter requesting that Moulay Zaydan intervene in the affair of the *Vliegende Hert* because, in 1610, the republic of the Netherlands and Sultan Moulay Zaydan had signed a treaty guaranteeing not only that each side's ships would not be attacked at sea by the other's, but that their ships would also be guaranteed safe harbor in each other's ports. The States-General was thus simply requesting that Moulay Zaydan live up to his treaty obligations by ensuring that a Dutch ship moored in one of his ports was returned to its rightful Dutch owners.

Moulay Zaydan sent the following reply, dated July 25, 1625, to the Sates-General:

There came to our Sublime Court a man of your nation carrying a letter from you. He introduced himself as the agent of the owner of a ship that Captain Jan Ververen had abandoned at the port of Salé—well protected by Allah. Our servant, the Caïd of the said port, sent to Our High Majesty a letter from the captain who had deserted his ship. Moreover, he [the Caïd of Salé] did all that was necessary for the custody and preservation of this vessel, and spent on this task four *ounces* [an *ounce* was a silver coin] a day.

Despite this care, the ship eventually began to deteriorate, which happens, as you know, in such a

situation. This is why the Caïd saw fit to ask Our High Lordship's authorization to sail the ship under command of some *raïs* ["*raïs*" means "captain"] which was granted. The *raïs* so authorized proceeded to repair the ship and to provision it with all that was necessary. The costs of these repairs reached the approximate figure of twenty thousand *ounces*, as you can see by examining the enclosed receipt written by the *raïs* himself. The repairs completed, he set sail and has not yet returned from his expedition.

The issue of this ship can be resolved in three ways: the first is the reimbursement by the shipowners of all refitting costs paid by the said *raïs* who, once reimbursed, would hand over the ship; the second would be to bring the said *raïs* before the courts in a legal action for the restitution of the said ship; the third would consist of an amicable compromise.

So what happened here was that, after being repaired and refitted during the winter of 1624-25, the *Vliegende Hert* was taken out for the summer corsair season under the command of a Salé *raïs*. Moreover, this *raïs* was insisting that, as a condition of returning the ship to its rightful owners, he be refunded all the money he had invested in fixing it so that it was is proper shape for his corsair expedition.

Not surprisingly, this demand outraged the owners/backers of the *Vliegende Hert*. Not only had their own considerable investment in Captain Ververen's privateering venture born no result, they were now being asked to finance this *raïs's* corsair venture as a condition of getting their ship back. One can only imagine the scene when they first heard the news.

No doubt, they saw Sultan Moulay Zaydan as being complicit in this—to them—disgraceful swindle. But despite Moulay Zaydan's regal language in his letter ("Our servant, the Caïd of the said port …" "This is why the Caïd saw fit to ask Our High Lordship's authorization…"), his response shows, in fact, that he did not have much real control over this situation and demonstrates just how limited his power as Sultan actually was at this time.

During much of the first half of the seventeenth century, Morocco was gripped by a very nasty civil war. When the Moroccan Sultan al-Abbas Ahmad al-Mansur died (of plague) in 1603, a violent struggle for power arose between his three sons: Abu Faris, Muhammad al-Ma'mun, and Moulay Zaydan. By the late 1620s, only Moulay Zaydan was still standing.

This multi-decade, fratricidal melee was so brutally devastating that an early eighteenth century chronicler of Moroccan history described it as dreadful enough to make the hair of a suckling infant turn white. So though Moulay Zaydan was nominally the victor, and nominally Sultan of Morocco, the country he presided over was, in fact, in a state of pretty much constant, churning, bloody chaos throughout his lifetime—a chaos which Moulay Zaydan's sons were forced to contend with after his death and which eventually proved their undoing.

As a result of all this, Moulay Zaydan had severely limited control over the country he was supposed to be ruling. Moreover, in May of 1627, Salé declared itself an independent republic owing no fealty to Moulay Zaydan or any other Lord.

So when the gentlemen of the States-General had requested Moulay Zaydan to "give orders to the said Governor of Salé so that the said vessel and its goods

should be returned to the petitioners," Moulay Zaydan was unable to do so. Despite any pretense of his to the contrary, Salé was beyond his influence in matters such as these. The best he could manage was to forward on the *raïs's* bill for the refitting of the ship and say, essentially: "You need to work this out among yourselves."

Neither the owners/backers of the *Vliegende Hert* nor the gentlemen of the States-General were prepared to negotiate with underlings. From their perspective, it no doubt seemed far preferable to deal with the sovereign himself. The gentlemen of the States-General didn't seem to grasp—or perhaps refused to acknowledge—how weak Moulay Zaydan's hold on power actually was. With what seems a rather naïve confidence in the inherent power of monarchy, they wrote a further letter of complaint to the Sultan on behalf of the *Vliegende Hert*'s owners/backers.

To read the letter the gentlemen of the States-General sent to Sultan Moulay Zaydan, and to see how events unfolded from here, go to *The Affair of the* Vliegende Hert *– Part 3.*

« THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 3
THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 1 »



THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 3

AUGUST 18, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of The Affair of the *Vliegende Hert – Parts 1 & 2*. If you haven't done so

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- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 2
January 9, 2023
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January 2, 2023

already, it's best to read those posts before continuing on here.)

The follow-up letter that the gentlemen of the States General wrote to the Moroccan Sultan Moulay Zaydan on behalf of the owners/backers of the *Vliegende Hert* was dated May 21, 1627. This was almost two years after Moulay Zaydan's original response. The cause of the delay is not clear. From the tone of the States-General's response, though, it seems as if Moulay Zaydan's letter might have taken a very long time to reach the Netherlands.

Here is the relevant section of the letter:

We have received Your Majesty's letter. Your Majesty has deigned to make an inquiry, upon our recommendation, concerning the vessel the *Vliegende Hert*, which has been left by Captain Jan Jansz. Ververen in the hands of the Caïd of Sale until the ship's owners can come to claim it. We thank Your Majesty very much.

However, as the said letter also indicates, the Caïd refuses to return the said vessel unless he is reimbursed for the costs incurred in preparing it for a sea voyage. Having received a new request from the shipowners to represent them, we do not feel we can refuse, and so we must insist to Your Majesty that the pretensions of the Caïd are, in our opinion, totally unfounded. It was not, indeed, for the needs of the ship that he equipped it, as the ship could very well lie moored in the harbor awaiting the arrival of the shipowners without requiring such expenditure. Instead, it was done with the voyage he wished to make in mind, a voyage from which he alone profited.



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

That is why we request Your Majesty to support the shipowners' rights and to order that the ship, or its value, be returned and that the said shipowners be discharged of all such expenditures that have not been made in their interest. We are quite ready to repay this service to Your Majesty.

If the States General ever received a response form Moulay Zaydan, it has no survived. It seems likely that they never received a response, though, because their next letter of complaint, dated September 3, 1627 (three months later), was addressed directly to "the Caïd of Salé, and to his Admiral."

There was, of course, no practical way to bring the *raïs* who had taken the *Vliegende Hert* on a corsair cruise and billed the shipowners for it "before the courts." Indeed, which courts, exactly, would these have been? However, the States-General (or, more likely, the owners/backers) were apparently still not ready to consider a compromise solution. They focused instead on the ethics of their claim for restitution:

Some time ago, at the request of the shipowners of the *Vliegende Hert*, the ship that Captain Jan Jansen Ververen left in your hands, we requested His Royal Highness, His Majesty of Morocco, to take the necessary measures for the said vessel to be restored to the aforesaid shipowners. It has pleased His Majesty to reply that you have demanded the reimbursement of the expenses which have been incurred to prepare the vessel for the sea. We cannot but respond to His majesty, and to you, that, in our

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022
- November 2022
- October 2022
- September 2022
- August 2022
- July 2022
- June 2022
- May 2022
- April 2022
- March 2022
- February 2022
- January 2022
- December 2021
- November 2021
- October 2021
- September 2021
- August 2021
- July 2021
- June 2021
- May 2021
- April 2021
- March 2021
- February 2021
- January 2021
- December 2020
- November 2020
- October 2020
- September 2020
- August 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019

opinion, this request is unfounded, because, as the aforementioned shipowners say, it was not for them that you refitted the ship for a sea voyage, but for yourselves, and that you took the profit from the trip.

That is why we ask you not to impose unfairly upon the said shipowners the expenses which have not been incurred by them, but to restore to them the said vessel, or its full value, as is only fair and reasonable.

The above letter is the final one in the series of documents that have survived relating to the affair of the *Vliegende Hert*. So we do not know how—or if—the affair was eventually resolved. It isn't hard to guess how events transpired, though.

Salé at this time, remember, was a corsair capital—that is, a pirate capital. Trying to employ an ethical argument, as the gentlemen of the States General did, to convince a pirate captain to give up a ship he had recently acquired (a ship originally outfitted for piracy and a ship he had acquire for free) seems rather like trying to talk an African lioness into relinquishing an antelope she has just killed.

Here is how things likely worked out.

Once Captain Jan Jansen Ververen had absconded with his ill-gotten fortune and the *Vliegende Hert* lay abandoned in the Salé harbor, the Caïd went to see the Admiral of Salé. In this case, the term 'Admiral' was not a nautical one. The Salé 'Admiral' didn't command the fleet of Salé corsair ships out at sea. Rather, he was a combination Harbor Master and Customs Official, and he also sat in on the

- November 2019
- October 2019
- September 2019
- August 2019
- July 2019
- June 2019
- May 2019
- April 2019
- March 2019
- February 2019
- January 2019
- December 2018
- November 2018
- October 2018
- September 2018
- August 2018
- July 2018
- June 2018
- May 2018
- April 2018
- March 2018
- February 2018
- January 2018

deliberations of the Ruling Council of the city—which is how the Caïd and he would have known each other.

The Salé Admiral was not merely a bureaucratic city official, though; he was also a corsair captain.

So the Caïd likely went to him and said something like the following: "There's this Dutch privateer ship just sitting in the harbor, doing nothing. I can arrange for you to have possession of it so you can take it out for a corsair cruise—and we can split the profits."

How could the Admiral resist an offer like that? Not only a free ship, but a free Dutch privateer ship, specially equipped for piracy.

So the Admiral of Salé was the *raïs* who took the *Vliegende Hert* out corsairing.

It's impossible to know which of them—the Caïd or the Admiral—came up with the idea of charging the Dutch for the cost of equipping the *Vliegende Hert* for the corsair cruise. Such brazen chutzpah was not uncommon, though. These were, after all, pirates—men who could be utterly ruthless when circumstances called for it, and whose daily lives must have been filled with callous opportunism.

Since the Admiral of Salé had been out in the *Vliegende Hert* on a corsair expedition during the summer of 1625, and since the ship still hadn't been returned two years later in the spring of 1627, it is likely that he commanded the *Vliegende Hert* for several summers worth of corsair expeditions (corsairing was a summer occupation in Salé)—probably splitting the profits from at least some of those expeditions with the Caïd.

It is highly unlikely that either man ever had any serious intention of returning the *Vliegende Hert* to its rightful owners.

Such was life in the turbulent seventeenth century.

The story of the *Vliegende Hert* is interesting enough in its own right, but it also provides us with something quite unique. Remember what Moulay Zaydan wrote in his letter to the States General:

"The Caïd saw fit to ask Our High Lordship's authorization to sail the ship under command of some *raïs*, which was granted. The *raïs* so authorized proceeded to repair the ship and to provision it with all that was necessary. The costs of these repairs reached the approximate figure of twenty thousand *ounces*, as you can see by examining the enclosed receipt written by the *raïs* himself."

That "receipt written by the *raïs* himself" is a unique document. It lists the complete, itemized cost of equipping a ship for a corsair expedition.

To see this complete receipt, go to *The Affair of the* Vliegende Hert *– Part 4.*

For those who may be interested, the letters quoted in these posts can be found in *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc, première séries, dynastie Saadienne: archives et bibliothèques des Pays-Bas, tome IV* (*The Unpublished Sources of Moroccan History, First Series, Saadian Dynasty, Archives and Libraries of the Netherlands, Volume 4*).

Les sources inédites, première séries is an invaluable, multi-volume series in which is collected virtually every hand-written letter or report ever composed

by any European concerning Morocco during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The editor, Henry de Castries, sent a hoard of indefatigable scholars to libraries and archives across Europe to troll through their contents and carefully transcribe everything relevant they found—a monumental undertaking. He then published it all in a series of well-organized volumes over a number of years in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The contents of *Les sources inédites* are all rendered into French from their original languages. The English translations in these posts are my own.

The November 4, 1624, letter from the States-General of the Netherlands to Sultan Moulay Zaydan can be found in *SIHM P-B 4*, pp. 31-3.

Moulay Zaydan's July 25, 1625 reply to the Sates-General can be found in *SIHM P-B 4*, pp. 135-136.

The States General's May 21, 1627 letter to Moulay Zaydan can be found in *SIHM P-B 4*, pp. 158-59.

The States General's September 3, 1627 letter "the Caïd of Salé and to his Admiral" can be found in *SIHM P-B 4*, pp. 175-76.

The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson

The story of the Barbary corsair raid on Iceland in 1627

Amazon listing



THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 4

AUGUST 11, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of The Affair of the *Vliegende Hert – Parts 1, 2, & 3*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read those posts before continuing on here.)

Remember what Moulay Zaydan wrote in his letter to the States General regarding the *Vliegende Hert*:

"The Caïd saw fit to ask Our High Lordship's authorization to sail the ship under command of some *raïs* which was granted. The *raïs* so authorized proceeded to repair the ship and to provision it with all that was necessary. The costs of these repairs reached the approximate figure of twenty thousand *ounces*, as you can see by examining the enclosed receipt written by the *raïs* himself."

That "receipt written by the *raïs* himself" is a unique document, for it lists the complete, itemized cost of equipping a ship for a corsair expedition in the 1620s.

The receipt is reproduced (in translation) below. In order to make sense of it, though, we first need a little background.

The costs listed in the receipt are in the local currency of Salé: blanquilles, ounces, and ducats. Blanquilles are abbreviated as "b^{os}" (for "blanquillos"); ducats are abbreviated as "d^{os}" (for "ducatos"). There was also a small copper coin used in Salé, known as a flux, but this coin doesn't appear anywhere in the bill, no doubt because it was worth too little to be relevant.

The relative values of these coins were as follows: 16 fluxes equaled 1 blanquille; 4 blanquilles equaled 1 ounce; 10 ounces equaled 1 silver ducat. There was also a gold ducat, but its value apparently varied considerably depending on its relative scarcity or plenty. The ducats mentioned in the receipt are the silver ducat.

2022
- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023

Quantities are measured in quintals. A quintal was a hundredweight. It is difficult to pin down exactly what base unit of weight was being used, but in all likelihood it was roughly the same as a standard pound (4.53 kilograms) today. So the quintals in his bill can be thought of as being roughly 100 pounds (about 45.3 kilograms).

Here is the bill in English translation (the original is in fractured Spanish, interspersed with what appear to be Portuguese words):

Copy of expenses incurred by me, Morat Reis, in refitting the ship

---

– For 209 boards I bought to repair the ship,

at 9 B^{os} each

d^{os} 47

– For 90 beams that cost 2 ounces each,

amount

d^{os} 18

– For 10 large planks to make the doors for the

ship's cabins, amount

d^{os} 05

– For 5 quintal of nails [with which to] to nail the ship

amount

d^{os} 25

- December 2022
- November 2022
- October 2022
- September 2022
- August 2022
- July 2022
- June 2022
- May 2022
- April 2022
- March 2022
- February 2022
- January 2022
- December 2021
- November 2021
- October 2021
- September 2021
- August 2021
- July 2021
- June 2021
- May 2021
- April 2021
- March 2021
- February 2021
- January 2021
- December 2020
- November 2020
- October 2020
- September 2020
- August 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019
- November 2019
- October 2019
- September 2019

– For 20 quintals of iron that I bought for the ship's works

and for ballast
d^{os} 90

– For canvas I bought for sails for the ship

that [is]
d^{os}

50

– For 15 quintals of powder, which cost 15 d^{os}

per quintal
d^{os} 225

– For 10 quintals of bullets, at 3½ ducats each

per quintal, amount
d^{os} 35

– For 3 pieces of cloth for shields and for canvas

for the aforementioned [shields] and to make them
d^{os} 79

– For tar to tar the ship
d^{os} 20

– For 10 quintals of rope for the ship, at 3 ducats per

quintal
d^{os} 30

– For 44 new pipes [barrels for wine, water, etc.] to replace

the old ones and for sheathing for the ship
dos 75

– For pots for cooking on the ship
dos 15

– For a ship's boat that I bought for the ship dos 25

– For loading the ballast aboard the ship
dos 20

– For 8 quintals of tallow to grease the ship, at

3 ½ ducats per quintal
dos 28

– For charcoal to burn aboard the ship
dos 14

– For firewood for the ship
dos 08

– For carpenters who worked 3 months to refit

the ship
dos 120

– For 140 quintals of biscuits for the voyage
dos 154

– For oil and for vinegar for the crew of the ship
dos 65

– For butter for the crew
dos 30

– For olives for the said crew
d^{os} 18

– For 16 quintals of rice at 20 ounces
d^{os} 32

– For ground wheat
d^{os} 16

– For maintenance expenses for the people involved in

repairing the ship
d^{os} 120

– For small expenses like cartridge paper

compass, candle wicks, band keys, wax candles

and other ordinary expenses
d^{os} 110

———

d^{os} 1474

As well as the above, I have given 395 ducats as a loan

to the soldiers so that they can ship with me,

as is customary
d^{os} 395

———

D^{os} 1869

Signed: Moeraetteres

The items listed in this bill fit into four different categories:

- the cost of materials for repairing the ship
- the cost of labor for repairing the ship
- the cost of materials for refitting the ship for the upcoming corsair cruise
- the cost of provisions for the crew

There is also the coast of giving the “soldiers”—crewmembers who would do the fighting if a prize had to be attacked and boarded—an advance.

Below is a table showing the various subtotals and the final total for all this, plus the approximate percentages of the total cost that each area of expense represents.

TYPE OF EXPENSE	COST	PERCENTAGE
Materials for repair	d^{os} 313	17%
Labor for repair	d^{os} 260	14%
Materials for refitting	d^{os} 586	31%
Provisions	d^{os} 315	17%
Loan to soldiers	d^{os} 395	21%
TOTAL COST	d^{os} 1869	100%

As you can see, the cost of repairing the ship—including both materials and labor—represented almost a third (31%) of the total expense. From the items listed—209 boards, 90 beams, 10 large planks, 500 pounds of nails, 2,000 pounds of ironmongery, 1,000 pounds of rope, an unspecified amount of tar, 800 pounds of tallow, plus sails—it looks like the *Vliegende Hert* was actually in fairly poor shape.

It took a team of carpenters three months to complete the repairs. They would have done this work over the winter, at the Salé shipyards, hauling the ship up out of the river and working on it on dry land. The tar would have been smeared over the planks of the hull—at least some of which, presumably, were new—to seal them and preserve them against the corrosive effects of seawater. The tallow would have gone on over the tar to increase the slickness of the hull and thus reduce drag in the water and make the ship faster.

They would have first finished repairs on the hull and then returned the ship back to the water and restored the decks and superstructure and rigged her.

The most expensive single aspect (31% of the total) was the materials needed to refit the ship for the corsair cruise. Cooking supplies (charcoal, firewood, pots) seem an obvious necessity. “Shields” are not so obvious, and it is unclear exactly what these might have been. It is interesting to note here that the *raïs* bought a compass—which, of course, he would have needed for navigating.

The most costly item among the refitting supplies was gunpowder—no less than 1,500 pounds of it. It is significant that while the *raïs* bought this large quantity of gunpowder, plus 1,000 pounds of cannon

balls, he did not buy any cannon. The *Vliegende Hert*, remember, was originally outfitted as a privateer ship and so would have carried a number of cannon—exactly how many is impossible to determine, though. There is also no mention of the caliber of the cannon balls, so we cannot know what sort of cannon the *Vliegende Hert* was armed with either.

Foodstuffs accounted for 17% of the total cost. The list gives us a pretty good idea of what Salé corsairs lived on while on a cruise. The basic staple was hardtack biscuit. These were eaten along with rice (cooked aboard ship), ground wheat (it is not clear what exactly this would have been used for, but it was likely couscous), and oil, butter, vinegar, and olives. It is also not clear why there is no animal protein in the list. This omission does not mean the crew would not have eaten meat or fish. They would have: salted meat and fresh-caught fish were common sailors' fare.

One of the more intriguing aspects of this receipt is the inclusion of a loan—an advance—to the "soldiers." Such soldiers made up the majority of the crews aboard Salé corsair ships. Unfortunately, there is no easy way to work out how many soldiers might be represented here by the figure of 395 ducats and therefore no straightforward way to figure out crew size.

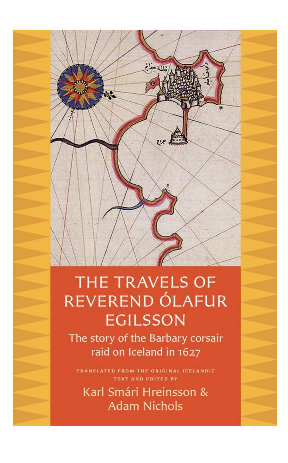
So there you have it: the cost of equipping a ship for a corsair expedition the 1620s.

There's one question that still remains, though: How much did 1,869 ducats represent? That is, what did 1,869 ducats buy in the 1620s? Are we talking the equivalent in modern-day monetary terms of

thousands of dollars? Hundreds of thousands? Millions?

For a consideration of the relative value and buying power of Salé ducats (and of seventeenth century currency in general) see the next (and final) post in this series: *The Affair of the* Vliegende Hert – *Part 5*.

For those who may be interested, the receipt for the refitting of the *Vliegende Hert* can be found in *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc, première séries, dynastie Saadienne: archives et bibliothèques des Pays-Bas, tome IV* (*The Unpublished Sources of Moroccan History, First Series, Saadian Dynasty, Archives and Libraries of the Netherlands, Volume 4*), pp. 130-131. As mentioned above, though, the original is in fractured Spanish, interspersed with what appear to be Portuguese words, so it isn't all that easy to make detailed sense of unless you can cope with the seventeenth century Spanish/Portuguese.



The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson

The story of the Barbary corsair raid on Iceland in 1627

Amazon listing

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THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 5

AUGUST 5, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of The Affair of the *Vliegende Hert – Parts 1, 2, 3, & 4*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read those posts before continuing on here.)

The total cost of refitting the *Vliegende Hert*, remember, was 1,869 Salé ducats. The question

RECENT POSTS

we're going to address in this post is how much 1,869 ducats represented in the 1620s. To do that, we need to look at the relative value and buying power of Salé ducats (the currency used in Salé in the seventeenth century).

Seventeenth century currency is complicated. The various currencies in use at that time were not decimal. They derived directly from the monetary system established during Charlemagne the Great's reign (at the end of the eighth and beginning of the ninth centuries). Carolingian currency consisted of livres, sous, and deniers. The Carolingian system was notional, though: it specified relative values rather than coins in circulation. The only Carolingian coins actually struck were silver deniers (pennies). The Carolingian livre (French for 'pound') literally referred to a pound weight. Out of that livre, 240 deniers (silver pennies) could be struck.

This is the origin of the eccentric ratio of traditional English coinage (1 pound = 20 shillings = 240 pence) and of other coinages of the time like the French (1 livre = 20 sou = 240 deniers) and Italian (1 lire = 20 = soldi = 240 denari).

We know the exchange rate between Salé ducats and English pounds in the 1620s: 1 Salé ducat equaled 8 English shillings.

So the total cost of outfitting the *Vliegende Hert*, in English pounds was just under £750 (1,869 ducats x 8 = 14,952 shillings = equals £743 12s).

It's useful to know how much refitting the *Vliegende Hert* cost in English pounds because wages in seventeenth century England are fairly well documented. Farm laborers in England at the time earned about £8 to £10 a year, city laborers £10 to

- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022

£14, skilled craftsmen £12 to £20. London wages were higher, £18 for laborers and £30 for skilled craftsmen. These are imprecise estimates, based on idealized 5-day, 50-week years, but they still provide a rough gauge with which to assess the relative cost of things.

The total cost of refitting the *Vliegende Hert*, then, was the equivalent of no less than 75 years' wages for an ordinary farm laborer and nearly 23 years' wages for a skilled London craftsman.

Serious money indeed.

Little wonder that the Barbary corsair *raïs* who acquired the *Vliegende Hert* tried to be reimbursed for his investment.

This brings us to a final question: How much booty and how many captives would a corsair captain need to take in order to turn a profit?

We can work this out by imagining an ordinary corsair cruise, one that was neither a failure nor a grand success.

Let's say that a corsair expedition from Salé captured three merchant ships: one ship with a crew of fifteen (an average sized crew for a merchant ship of the time), and nothing of particular value in terms of cargo; another with a crew of thirteen, and a cargo of Spanish wine; and a third with a crew of twelve, thirteen passengers, and nothing of particular value in terms of cargo. Let's also say that the ship transporting the wine was considered worth keeping and was brought back to Salé along with the captives and the wine.

- November 2022
- October 2022
- September 2022
- August 2022
- July 2022
- June 2022
- May 2022
- April 2022
- March 2022
- February 2022
- January 2022
- December 2021
- November 2021
- October 2021
- September 2021
- August 2021
- July 2021
- June 2021
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- August 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019
- November 2019
- October 2019
- September 2019
- August 2019

So the total catch would have been one captured ship, about 80 tuns of wine—a merchant ship with a crew of 13 would have had a burthen (i.e., cargo capacity) of about 80 or 90 tuns—and 53 captives.

The captured merchant ship would have been worth somewhere around £700. Corsair booty, however, sold at steeply discounted prices—such booty was, after all, stolen goods—so the ship would not have fetched anywhere near that amount. It's hard to know just how discounted the selling price would have been, but if we assume a discount of something like 40%, that probably would not be too far wrong. So we can guesstimate that the merchant ship would have sold in the Salé markets for about £400.

In the early seventeenth century, a tun of wine was worth something like £5. (A "tun" was the seventeenth century equivalent of the modern shipping container. Tuns were large barrels or casks, normally considered to hold about 250 gallons of liquid. The 'tonnage' of a ship was not a record of its weight but, instead, a record of the number of tuns it could transport.) So 80 tuns of wine would have been worth about £400. Again, though, the wine would have been sold at a discount. So the wine was worth perhaps £240 in the Salé markets. Taken together, both ships and the wine equaled a total of about £640.

There are not many details about the prices for which captives were sold in Salé. There is, however, quite a lot of documentation for Algiers. Captives in Algiers typically sold for somewhere between 500 – 1,500 doubles (the standard Algerian silver coin). Four and a half doubles were roughly equal to 1 Spanish piece of eight. One Spanish piece of eight was, in turn, roughly equal to about 4 English

shillings. So 500 – 1,500 doubles would equal between about £22 – £66.

If we take a median figure of £30 per captive and assume the 53 captives were all sold at this price in Salé, the total worth of those captives would have been £1,590.

So the total proceeds of this (imaginary) corsair raid would have been about £1,630.

This sum of money had to be divvied up, though. One fifth (£326) went to the *Caïd* (the Governor) of Salé. There would also have been customs duties and various other fees to be paid, probably equaling about 10% (£163). So by the time all that was siphoned off, the amount left would have been reduced to a £1,141.

This amount, however, had to be divvied up between any backers of the expedition and the crew. The crew might have shared out perhaps 20% or the total profits (this is a guess, but a reasonable one). So the total profit would now be reduced to £913.

It is unlikely that the corsair captain would have been the sole the sole backer of the expedition. He might quite possibly own a 50% share, though.

This means the total profit for this (imaginary) corsair expedition for the captain would have been a little over £456.

The total cost of outfitting the *Vliegende Hert*, remember, was just under £750.

So a corsair captain's profits from an ordinarily successful corsair expedition wouldn't have been

anywhere near enough to offset the cost of outfitting the *Vliegende Hert*.

No wonder the corsair captain tried to force the Dutch to pay those costs.

The amounts of money here are quite great for the time (£456 represents 45 years' worth of wages for an ordinary English farm laborer of the time), but the profit margins were not particularly large.

So even after a reasonably successful corsair cruise, much of the profit was siphoned off into the pockets of the merchants, the *Caïd*, the port authorities, etc., and not as much ended up in the pockets of the corsair captains as one might initially think.

All of this means that most Salé corsair captains—and most corsair captains in general—probably did not do much more than eke out a living most of the time.

They would all, however, have been waiting for a big score that would bring them sudden huge profits. Those who—through luck or skill—managed to make one of those big scores became very wealthy men. The rest survived as best they could.

Such were the times.

Corsairs & Captives

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THE STORY OF THE HORNACHEROS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CORSAIR REPUBLIC OF SALÉ – PART 1

NOVEMBER 2, 2018 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

RECENT POSTS

- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 2 January 9, 2023
- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 1 January 2, 2023
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 2 December 25, 2022
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19,

This series of posts recounts the story of a group of Spanish Muslims—the Hornacheros—and the role they played in the founding of what eventually became the Barbary corsair republic of Salé.

Salé, located on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, had been a trading center since the time of the Romans. Starting in the early seventeenth century, however, it rapidly became one of the most important corsair centers of the age.

In order to trace the sequence of events that led to the founding of Salé as a seventeenth century corsair capital, we need to go back to another century entirely, and to a famous year… 1492.

That was the year, of course, in which Christopher Columbus first set sail for the New World. It was also, however, the year in which another less-well-known event happened: the Spanish *Recoquista* (the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula) culminated that year with the capitulation of the last remaining Muslim Emirate, in Granada.

After the better part of eight centuries, Islamic Spain —*al-Andalus*—ceased to be part of the *dâr al-Islâm.*

After the fall of Grenada, tens of thousands of Islamic refugees fled the Iberian Peninsula, dispersing across North Africa. Many remained, though. After all, with a history stretching back eight centuries, they felt Spain to be their homeland.

Initially, the Muslims who had chosen to remain were accorded a degree of religious freedom. But this did not last. Over the decades, they were compelled, with increasingly brutality, to become Christian. These forcibly converted Muslims became known as Moriscos. Despite converting, their communities

2022
- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023

tended to retain a high degree of cultural cohesion, something the Spanish authorities always remained deeply suspicious of, and it was generally suspected that Moriscos continued to practice Islam in secret.

More and more repressive edicts were promulgated, forcing Moriscos to give up their customary way of dressing, their traditional dietary habits, their Arabic language, their baths. In an official attempt to root out heresy and backsliding in the Morisco 'new Christian' population and enforce Catholic orthodoxy, the Spanish Inquisition employed its distinctive combination of property confiscation, interrogation under torture, and, as the ultimate deterrent, execution by burning at the stake in dramatic community *autos da fé* (acts of faith).

From the point of view of the Catholic Spaniards, none of these approaches worked satisfactorily. Morisco populations were indeed Christianized and integrated into Spanish Catholic society—intermarriage between the two groups was not uncommon—but they also continued to maintain, at least to some degree, a separate cultural identity. And in response to the repressive measures introduced by the Spanish authorities, violent and destructive Morisco rebellions erupted—all of which were brutally put down.

In the early 1600s, the Spanish were not only worried about internal problems related to the Moriscos; they were also worried about events outside Spain. For more than a century, the vanquished, exiled Muslims of *al-Andalus* had been agitating indefatigably for a return to their lost homeland, nursing a fervent hope that some powerful Muslim ruler—the Ottoman Sultan, the Pasha of Algiers, the Sa'adian Sultan in Morocco—would champion their cause and bring back the glory days of *al-Andalus*-

that-was. In Spain itself, Morisco communities had remained in contact with their North African relatives, some giving secret aid to Barbary corsair raiders when they attacked the Iberian coast.

The Spanish authorities worried that thousands of exiled Muslims from *al-Andalus*, perhaps with Ottoman backing, would launch an invasion of Spain, and that the local Morisco populations would simultaneously rise up in revolt from within.

It was too much for them.

After considerable debate, the Spanish government settled on a 'final solution' to the problem: expel the entire Morisco population from Spain.

This expulsion was an act of ethnic cleansing, with all the brutality and human misery such acts entail. Though it is difficult to assess numbers accurately, a reasonable estimate seems to be that something like 300,000 Moriscos were forcibly removed from their homes, driven aboard waiting ships bound for North Africa (or, in some cases, herded across the border into France), and cast out of Spain forever.

For these *expulsados*, as they were known, the situation was filled with misery in every imaginable way. Most were allowed to take only what belongings they could carry. All else they owned was confiscated by the Spanish authorities. As they trudged to the ships that would take them away to exile, many became victims of robbers, and what little property they had managed to salvage was stolen from them. Perhaps as many as a third of the total number died—while trying to resist the expulsion, during sea voyages, or upon arrival in North Africa.

It became official Spanish policy to forcibly take away Morisco children under the age of seven—so that they could be reared as proper Catholics. Thousands were irrevocably separated from their parents.

When the grieving, traumatized Morisco adults eventually boarded the ships that had been prepared to carry them across the Mediterranean, many were forced to pay for their passage. And then, when they finally reached North Africa, they found themselves unwelcome. The Catholic Spanish had seen them as secret Muslims and unreliable Christians; North African Muslims saw them as secret Christians and unreliable Muslims.

In Morocco, the Moriscos' arrival constituted nothing less than a human tsunami. Tens of thousands arrived overnight.

Mostly, the Moriscos who settled in Morocco have come down to us through history as a faceless mass of desperate refugees. There is, however, one dramatic exception to this: the Hornacheros—so called because they came from the town of Hornachos, in Extremadura, in mid-western Spain, nearish to what is today the Portuguese border.

Morisco communities in general tended to be self-inclusive. The Hornacheros took this to an extreme. They spoke Arabic rather than Spanish. Under a veneer of nominal Catholicism, they practiced Islam (among other things, circumcising their male children before baptism and then telling the priests who performed the baptismal ceremony that the children were born that way). They bribed the local Inquisitors and Spanish officials to stay out of their business, and they essentially ran their town as an independent republic.

The Hornacheros had also bribed the Spanish King, King Philip III, with the princely sum of 30,000 ducats (a *huge* amount of money), for the right to keep weapons—a right denied to other Morisco communities. So they were well armed. They had a reputation for killing and robbing travelers, doing so with the weapons they had induced the king to allow them to keep, and there were stories of mass graves filled with their victims in the fields outside the town. They were also reputed to be running a large-scale counterfeiting operation.

They seem to have been—or perhaps had been forced to become—a sort of Morisco *cosa nostra*.

The expulsion of the Spanish Moriscos was accomplished in stages, each stage preceded by an official royal edict of expulsion. On December 9, 1609, one such royal edict was issued for Granada (in southern Spain), Murcia (in southeast Spain), and Andalusia (southern Spain again)—and for the town of Hornachos.

The Hornacheros had such a notorious reputation that they were specifically singled out for expulsion.

Try as they might, the Hornacheros could not bribe their way out of this situation. Spanish troops arrived to escort them out of Hornachos—or drive them out should that prove necessary. Life as they had known it was over, and ahead lay only uncertainty…

For more on the story of the Hornacheros, how they ended up in Morocco, and how they became instrumental in launching the (in)famous corsair republic of Salé, see *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 2*.

Corsairs & Captives



THE STORY OF THE HORNACHEROS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CORSAIR

RECENT POSTS

REPUBLIC OF SALÉ – PART 2

OCTOBER 25, 2018 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 1*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read that post before continuing on here.)

In his first royal expulsion edict, the Spanish King Philip III had expressly forbidden exiled Moriscos from liquidating their property before departing the country (the state and well-connected individuals would acquire it). Departing Moriscos were permitted to bring with them only what they could carry. Subsequent royal edicts, however, stated that Moriscos in Old Castile, New Castile, La Mancha, and Extremadura would be granted a special thirty-day grace period during which, if they chose to leave Spain voluntarily, they could sell their property and possessions and then take the proceeds out of the country with them.

The Hornacheros took advantage of this opportunity (Hornachos was in Extremadura), or perhaps they simply had a lot of ready cash to hand. Whatever the case, when, in late January, 1610, they were forcibly escorted by soldiers out of their village *en mass* and marched off to Seville, they took with them considerable money and possessions—including their weapons.

Before they left, though, they had one final calamity to face: their young children were taken from them —to be adopted by Catholic families and reared as good Catholics. There is no way of knowing the



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

details of how this was done, whether by brute force or negotiation or subterfuge. But done it was, and when the Hornacheros left their ancestral home, they did so without their young children.

It is not entirely clear how many Hornacheros took part in this exodus. Estimates of the population of the town of Hornachos and environs at the time vary from about 2,500 to 4,000 or 5,000. A figure of about 3,000 people—men, women, and not-so-young children—seems reasonable.

This is a sizeable group to march off down the road. But, with armed soldiers goading them, they set off.

The driving distance, today, between Hornachos and Seville is about 100 miles (160 kilometers). In 1610, however, there was nothing remotely equivalent to a modern highway system, and the route would have been less direct, amounting to a distance of perhaps 125 to 150 miles (200 – 240 kilometers) or more. Marching such a distance with several thousand people burdened with their possessions—and grieving for their lost lives and their lost children—must have been a complicated, difficult process. It took them several weeks to reach Seville.

Ships lay waiting there to take them across the Strait of Gibraltar to Morocco. They had to face one final indignity before boarding, though: they were forced to pay for their passage. After this was somehow dealt with—one can only imagine the scene—the several thousand Hornacheros embarked aboard the waiting ships and set sail for Moroccan. (See the map below for the geography of all this.)

ARCHIVES



It is not entirely clear where the Hornacheros were disembarked, but it was likely Tangier, one of the presidios—armed forts under Spanish control, surrounded by hostile locals—that the Spanish maintained along the North African coast. Once off the ships, the Hornacheros would have been hustled though the presidio itself and thrust out into the countryside.

Northern Morocco was in general not a welcoming place for newly arrived *expulsados*. Mostly, they were seen by the local population as suspect Muslims and unwelcome strangers. There was one place where *expulsados* might expect to be accepted, though: Tetouan, located about 40 miles (65 kilometers) southeast of Tangier. During the diaspora that followed the defeat of the last Muslim kingdom in Spain—*al-Andalus*—in 1492, a sizable population of Spanish Muslims had settled in Tetouan. A hundred years or so later, the city still had a majority Andalusian population and so was far more welcoming to the new wave of Morisco *expulsados* than most of the other settlements in northern Morocco.

So the Hornacheros headed for Tetouan.

It would not have been an easy trip.

If they made the journey overland, they would have had to traverse the Riff Mountains, fending off attacks along the way by local tribesmen who would have considered them legitimate prey. If they managed to hire ships to make the voyage, they would surely have had to pay outrageous prices. One way or another, though, they made the trip and arrived in Tetouan.

Once there, they face a whole new problem.

Morocco was in the middle of a very nasty civil war. Back in 1603, *the Moroccan* Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur had died (of plague). Al-Mansur had three sons. After his death, all three fought bitterly against each other for possession of the throne. Moreover, not only was it three brothers, each against each: their sons took part in the fight as well. This violent fratricidal struggle for power tore Morocco apart. When the

Hornacheros arrived, they found themselves in the middle of a stirred-up hornets' nest.

Their solution was to align themselves with one of the three warring brothers: Moulay Zaydan. This proved a wise—or lucky—choice, for Moulay Zaydan would end being the only surviving brother and so, by default, eventually ascended the throne. (As we'll see in a future post in this series, though, the bloody chaos of the fratricidal civil war had so shattered Moroccan society that Moulay Zaydan was never able to establish control over more than a small portion of the country.)

When the Hornacheros arrived in Tetouan, Moulay Zaydan was just beginning what would eventually be his rise to ascendency. Things were still very uncertain, though. Because the struggle for the Moroccan throne had devolved into a violent clash of brother against brother, cousin against cousin, neighbor against neighbor, Moulay Zaydan had few local allies he could fully trust. His solution was to recruit Morisco troops—who had no local allegiances to corrupt them—to bolster his military forces.

Moulay Zaydan had laid claim to Salé, on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, but he maintained only a token presence there, no more than a garrison of perhaps a few dozen men. He needed a larger force to hold the place for him but could not spare the men.

The arrival of several thousand newcomers from Spain—well armed, well financed, with no local ties —presented him with an unexpected opportunity.

Moulay Zaydan offered the Hornacheros a deal.

He offered them Salé as a place they could settle. The deal was that the Hornacheros could make the

town their own, but they had to hold it for Moulay Zaydan and be loyal subjects to him.

The Hornacheros, of course, readily agreed.

Sometime in the spring or early summer of 1610, they gathered up their belongings and set off determinedly for their new home, making an overland trek of about 170 miles (275 kilometers), a considerable portion of it through mountainous country held by fractious tribesmen.

Somehow, they made it, hanging on to most of their people and their wealth.

Finally arriving at Salé, weary from the long journey, the Hornacheros presented themselves to the local inhabitants as representatives of Moulay Zaydan.

They received no welcome from the locals, however, who wanted nothing to do with them. Like Moroccans further north, they saw the Hornacheros as suspect—alien foreigners who spoke an uncouth form of Arabic, dressed in strange, ugly clothes and who no doubt held heretical religious views.

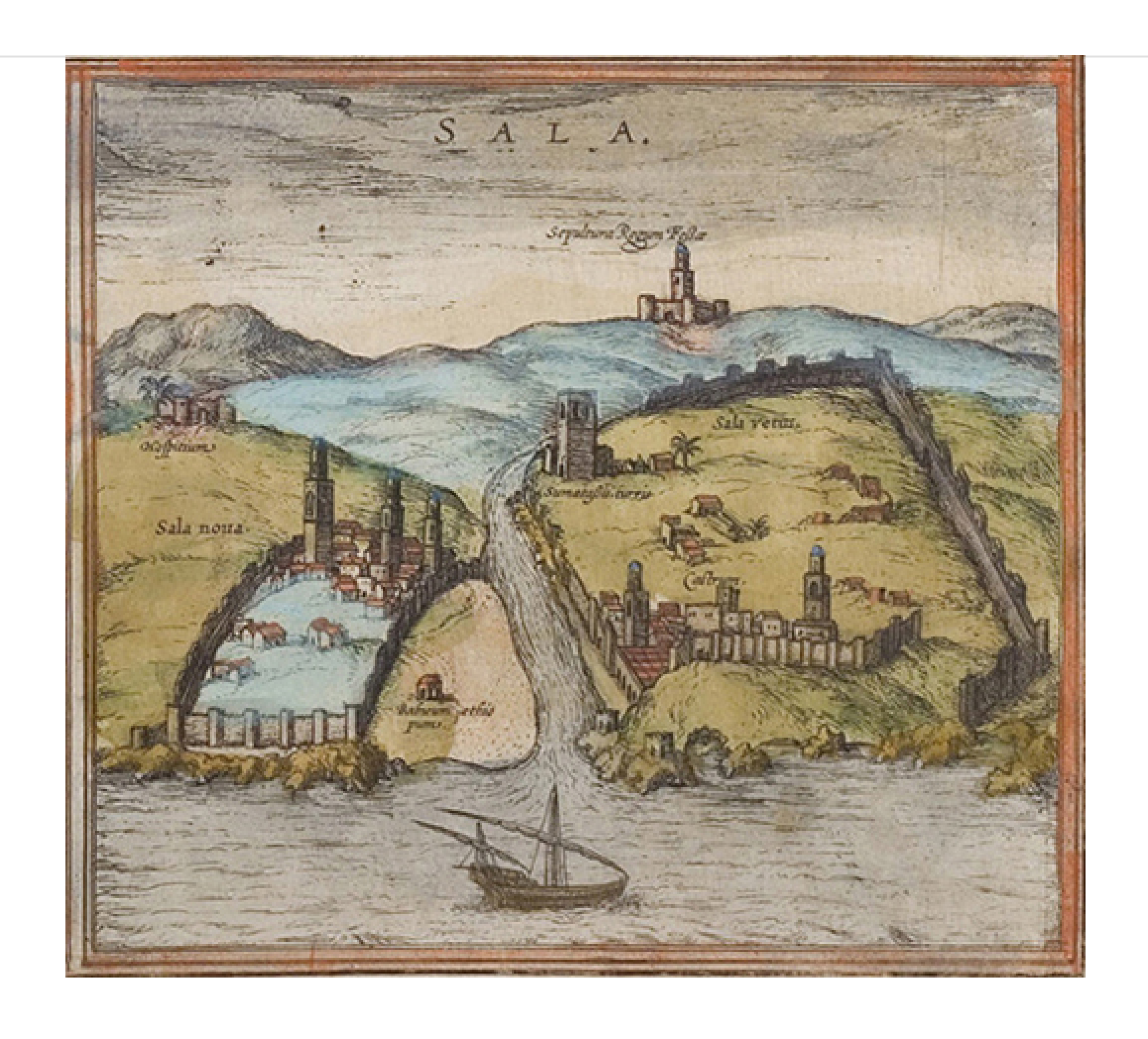
The Hornacheros ignored them and settled in anyway.

It was not a good beginning.

For more on how the Hornacheros became instrumental in launching the (in)famous corsair republic of Salé, see *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 3*.

The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson

Corsairs & Captives



THE STORY OF THE HORNACHEROS AND THE FOUNDING OF

THE CORSAIR REPUBLIC OF SALÉ – PART 3

OCTOBER 18, 2018 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 2*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read Parts 1 and 2 in this series before continuing on here.)

The town of Salé was (and still is) actually two towns. They sit across from each other on either bank at the mouth of the Bu Regreg river, which flows northwestwards into the Atlantic Ocean from its headwaters in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco. The town on the north bank of the river is today known as Salé, that on the south bank as Rabat (now the capital city of Morocco). The modern cities are frequently referred to as a single entity: Rabat-Salé, reflecting the place's dual nature. Seventeenth century Europeans, however, referred to the town on the north bank of the river as Old Salé and that on the south bank as New Salé.

Old Salé got its name because it had been around a long time, having originally been founded in the eleventh century. Over the centuries, it prospered both as a port (during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it was one the most important centers for trade with European nations) and as an intellectual and religious center (it contained a series if madrasas —religious schools—and Muslim holy men and marabouts flocked to it). When the Hornacheros arrived, Old Salé was an agricultural and trading

MASCARENHAS – PART 1 January 2, 2023

- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 2 December 25, 2022
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19, 2022
- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)

town, and still a religious center. Like almost every town of any size during this period, it had a high, protective wall. It is hard to know the exact population, but it seems unlikely that it ever reached much more than 7,000 or 8,000 in the early seventeenth century, and was likely less than that—a town rather than a city.

New Salé had a very different history.

The south bank of the Bu Regreg where it meets the sea consists of a rocky promontory almost 100 feet (30 meters) high. It is a perfect spot to place a defensive fortification. In the twelfth century, it became the site of a *ribāt*—a fortified garrison. (Rabat, the name the modern city now bears, derives from the *ribāt* originally built there.)

The *ribāt* only acquired real significance when it became the focus of an ambitious building project began by Abu Yusuf Yaʿqub al-Mansur, one of the Almohad Sultans—the Almohads being one of the various dynasties that, over the centuries, ruled *al-Andalus* (Islamic Spain) and North Africa.

Al-Mansur had grand plans for the site, re-naming the place *Ribāt al-Fath* (Citadel of Conquest) and intending to make it his new capital city and to use it as a major base from which to prosecute the holy war against the infidel Spaniards

Things didn't turn out that way, though.

The fortress of the *ribāt* was strengthened, a large perimeter wall was constructed to enclose the city-to-be, an aqueduct to bring in fresh water was built, and a grand mosque was begun, a mosque that would have been the largest in the world at that time if it had been completed.

ARCHIVES

But al-Mansur died (in 1199) and construction halted.

The city walls—built using innumerable slaves as a labor force—were a thoroughly impressive accomplishment, extended over three miles (about 5 kilometers) all told, averaging 8 feet (2.5 meters) in thickness and 25 feet (7.5 meters) high. But the city that was supposed to fill the space inside those walls was never built. Of the mosque, only the great tower of the minaret—known as Hassan Tower, 144 feet (44 meters) tall—remained.

The place fell into decay. The population dwindled. The aqueduct was destroyed. By the early 1500s, there were only two or three streets, with a few shabby shops on them, all located near what remained of the *ribāt* fortress on the promontory. The imposing perimeter walls enclosed only fields.

In the image above, you can see what Old and New Salé would have looked like when the Hornacheros arrived. The view is looking eastwards from the Atlantic. The Bu Regreg river, in the center of the image, flows down from the mountains into the sea. Old Salé is on the left, on the north bank of the river (though it is mislabeled in the image as "Sala Nova," Latin for New Salé); New Salé is on the right, on the river's south bank (it too is mislabeled: as "Sala Vetus," Latin for Old Salé). You can plainly see the empty fields inside the enclosing walls of New Salé.

This was essentially what the place was like when the Hornacheros arrived.

As mentioned in Part 2 of this series of posts on the Hornacheros, the inhabitants of Old Salé severely disapproved of this sudden influx of foreigners. Old Salé, remember, had a long tradition of being a religious center and an abode of holy men. Its pious

inhabitants viewed the Hornacheros as heretical. They made it very clear to the newcomers that they were not welcome in Old Salé.

So the Hornacheros set up in New Salé.

The place was a wreck, though. The extent of the ruination can been glimpsed in a remark made in a letter written by an English merchant who was in Morocco in the 1630s: “It was then in a manner desolate, abandoned by the Larbyes [the local inhabitants] because of wild beasts, for the ruinous castle had become a receptacle for lions, which there bred and terrified the poor peasants, so that they left the place and dwelt in doars [tents] in the open fields, less commodious but more secure.”

It is not too difficult to imagine how the Hornacheros must have felt when they realized that this new home they had finally reached was a crumbling ruin. They had little in the way of alternatives, though, so they chased out the lions (if there ever really had been lions denning there; there were indeed lions in Morocco at this time, but the English merchant was just repeating a story he had been told) and proceeded to rebuild. They chose to settle in the *ribāt* fortress—a place that would become known as the Qasba (from Arabic *al-Qasaba*, meaning “the town center” and also “the fortress”). By the time they were done, the Hornacheros had repaired the crumbling walls of the fortress and constructed over 200 houses inside those walls.

The Hornacheros, remember, had been an autonomous community back in Spain, so they were uniquely equipped to set themselves up in their new home. Soon—nobody knows quite how soon—they had rebuilt the Qasba and had a functioning self-ruling government going.

However, they found themselves surrounded on all sides by locals who mistrusted them and refused to accept them. Perhaps because of this, or perhaps because they simply had grand ambitions for the town they were founding, they sent out word to other Spanish *expulsados* in Morocco that Salé was a good place to settle. They even helped pay travel expenses for this new batch of settlers. As usual, it is difficult to come up with precise numbers, but it seems that a total of somewhere around 10,000 Andalusian *expulsados* made the trip to Salé. They built a town for themselves inside the great al-Mansur walls, separate from the Qasbah where the Hornacheros lived.

So now New Salé had a combined population of somewhere around 13,000 people—nearly double that of Old Salé.

Relations between the two towns rapidly deteriorated.

Meanwhile, the Hornacheros had to come up with some way to make their new and growing home economically viable.

The solution they settled on was… piracy.

The Hornacheros had control of New Salé. They had the financial resources and access to manpower (both the Andalusians and the local inhabitants). And both *expulsado* groups were blisteringly eager for a means to avenge themselves upon their Spanish persecutors, who had taken from them their homes, their young children, their livelihoods, and whatever original dreams and hopes they might once have had.

So they had the harbor, the resources, and the motivation.

By themselves, however, the *expulsados*—Hornacheros and Andalusians both—could not have transformed Salé into the pirate capital it would become. The Hornacheros may have been well funded and armed, but they came from an inland town in Spain, and so they had no experience as seamen. The Andalusians came from all over the Iberian Peninsula, but while some of them must have come from coastal areas, most of them probably had little experience with the sea; Spanish Moriscos were, on the whole, mostly farmers. If they had been left to their own devices, the two groups of *expulsados* would no doubt had made a go of things and created a prosperous town, but it would have been a market town, a farming town, a trading town. In order for the place to become a pirate capital, it first needed an influx of pirates to provide the necessary expertise.

Those arrived at just the right time—most of them from England.

For how English pirates factor into the creation the (in)famous corsair republic of Salé, see *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 4*.

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THE STORY OF THE HORNACHEROS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CORSAIR REPUBLIC OF SALÉ – PART 4

OCTOBER 11, 2018 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic*

RECENT POSTS

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- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 2 December 25, 2022
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19, 2022
- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022

of Salé – Part 3. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read Parts 1, 2, and 3 in this series before continuing on here.)

During the last couple of decades of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, the English and the Spanish were locked in a series of messy conflicts. The numerous battles—both land and sea—of the Anglo-Spanish conflict took place not only in and around Europe but also in the New World. Spain was *the* world power among European nations at the time. The Spanish colonies brought in huge wealth, much of it in the form of silver and gold. All that wealth had to be shipped across the Atlantic. The English did their best to intercept that shipping and to harass the Spanish colonies where it originated. Trying to accomplish this presented a problem, however. The English didn't have the naval resources to properly prosecute the war against Spanish shipping in the Atlantic and the Caribbean. To solve this problem, they employed privateers.

Privateers were a sort of legalized pirate. They were equipped with official authorization from their government to attack enemy shipping, which made their predatory behavior legal. The benefit of privateers from the point of view of the English Crown was that they required no initial outlay—the cost of equipping a privateering expedition were born entirely by the backers of individual ships—but the profits were split between the private backers and the government. The use of privateers thus allowed the English government to increase the number of armed ships available for the conflict against Spain without having to incur the extra expense of permanently enlarging the navy.

Over the nearly twenty years of the Anglo-Spanish conflict, English privateers hunted successfully



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022
- November 2022
- October 2022
- September 2022
- August 2022
- July 2022

throughout an enormous area, ranging from the English Channel down along the Atlantic coasts of Spain and Portugal to Morocco and the west coast of equatorial Africa, across to the northeastern coast of South America and the Spanish Main in the Caribbean, up to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland, and back across the North Atlantic. Over the years of hunting in this expanse of water, they gained a vast amount of experience, both as sailors and navigators, and as pirates and men of war.

But then the Anglo-Spanish war ended, and the extensive English privateering network was officially disbanded by royal decree. Many English privateers quietly returned to ordinary lives once again. A significant number, however, did not. Overnight, the status of these men changed from legal privateers to outlaw pirates. As a result, they could no longer operate out of English ports and had to find new ones.

It is an easy thing to overlook, but without suitable ports, pirates simply could not survive. They required two things from a port: merchants to whom they could sell their booty, and merchants from whom they could purchase the necessary supplies to revictual and refit their ships. These merchants had to not only be able and willing to buy stolen goods; they also needed to have extensive enough trade networks to export those stolen goods and to import the range of supplies required to refit the pirate ships.

Irish ports were the first ones English pirates turned to. Ireland in those days was a sort of maritime 'wild west.' English control was tenuous, small harbors and ports were plentiful, and the local people and their English overlords saw the profit in dealing with pirates, both in victualling their ships and

entertaining their crews (who had ready cash to spend) and in buying the stolen goods they offered at cut-rate prices.

The multiple small ports and cooperative population that Ireland offered were convenient enough, but some English pirates required more. Men who ranged the entire span of the North and South Atlantic needed better markets for their booty and better sources of supply than those the little backwater Irish harbors could provide, no matter how convenient and hospitable these harbors might have been. Plus, English naval forces began to harass the Irish ports. So the pirates went south in search of larger, better supplied, safer ports along the North Africa shore.

These homeless English pirates started showing up everywhere along the North African Mediterranean coast from Tripoli to Algiers. For those who continued to operate out in the Atlantic, though, Mediterranean ports were too distant to be practical. That left the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Many of the ports along that coast were in the hands of the Spanish. Not all, though. The two most important non-Spanish-controlled ports were al-Araish (modern Larache) and al-Ma'mura (modern Mehdya). Both were close to the Strait of Gibraltar.

Due to the sustained exploitation of the New World during the sixteenth century, there were now large numbers of ships conveying merchandise to and fro across the Atlantic. There was also an increase in secondary shipping rerouting New World wealth. Many of the shipping routes funneled into the bottle neck of the Strait of Gibraltar, either to the Spanish ports near it or to ports beyond it in the Mediterranean. All this shipping provided a continuous and reliable prey population that could

support a relatively large number of predatory pirates. Having a base near to it was crucial.

Al-Araish was the closest of the two ports (about 50 miles/80 kilometers south of the Strait), followed by al-Ma'mura (about 125 miles/200 kilometers south). Salé was also a possible option, but with these two ports available, there was little need to make use of Salé (which was 45 miles/72 kilometers further south than al-Ma'mura).

The Spanish took control of al-Araish in 1610, however. So that port became closed to English pirates. This left al-Ma'mum as the major port of choice. By 1611, there was a total of about 40 ships and 2,000 English pirates using al-Ma'mura as their home port. To serve such a large pirate population, an extensive and efficient black market (dominated by merchants from Livorno, Italy) developed to process the stolen goods the pirates had to offer and to sell them the merchandise they required.

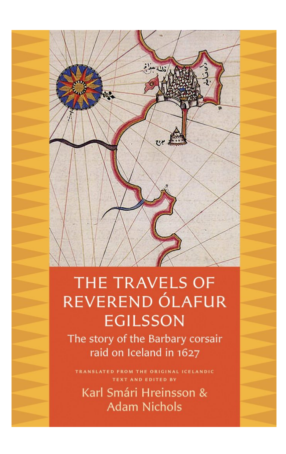
But al-Ma'mura did not last either.

In the summer of 1614, the Spanish sent a flotilla—an armada, almost—of ninety-nine ships and 5,000 men against the town. Most of the English pirates were out cruising at the time. Those few who remained in the port set fire to their ships where they lay at anchor in the harbor and escaped inland as best they might with what booty they could carry. The Spanish took the town.

This left Salé as the only major pirate-friendly port on Morocco's Atlantic coast not under Spanish control.

For how the of conjunction the English pirates and the Hornacheros led to the creation of the

(in)famous corsair republic of Salé, see the last post in this series: *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 5.*



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THE STORY OF THE HORNACHEROS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CORSAIR REPUBLIC OF SALÉ – PART 3 »



THE STORY OF THE HORNACHEROS AND THE FOUNDING OF THE CORSAIR REPUBLIC OF SALÉ – PART 5

OCTOBER 4, 2018 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

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- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 2 December 25, 2022
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19, 2022

(This post is a continuation of *The Story of the Hornacheros and the Founding of the Corsair Republic of Salé – Part 4*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read Posts 1-4 in this series before continuing on here.)

With the port of al-Ma'mura closed to them, the English pirates who had been using it scattered, some to the Caribbean, some to the Mediterranean, some as far afield as Asia. But some resettled in Salé, bringing with them ships, crews, and expert knowledge of the pirate profession. More importantly, some of the merchants who had been doing a brisk trade in stolen pirate booty in al-Ma'mura resettled in Salé as well, bringing with them both their business acumen and their connections to far-flung commercial networks throughout Europe and the Maghreb.

English pirates were not the only ones looking for a new port on the Atlantic, though.

Just as English privateers had been put out of work by peace with Spain, so too were Dutch privateers. In 1609, a truce was declared between the Netherlands and Spain, putting a temporary stop to what is known as the Eighty Years' War (the war for Dutch independence from Spain). The Dutch privateers who declined to return to life as merchant seamen went looking for new home bases. Like their English counterparts, they too descended upon Mediterranean ports.

Al-Araish and al-Ma'mum had been free ports, beyond the control of the Moroccan Sultan, who, remember, was desperately struggling to hold his dynasty together in the midst of a brutal civil war. There were no such free ports in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean corsair capitals—places like

- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022

Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers—were all Ottoman Regencies. In other words, they were all Muslim. They welcomed English and Dutch pirates alike, but they insisted these newcomers convert to Islam. Mostly, the pirates did that (the benefits were huge) and took up permanent residence.

Traditionally, Barbary corsairs sailed in galleys rowed by slaves chained to the oarbenches. These galleys were long, sleek, and fast, but they were designed for the relatively placid waters of the Mediterranean and were not suitable for voyages in the turbulent waters of the open Atlantic. The influx of English and Dutch pirates radically changed the North African corsairs' mode of operating. Once they had converted and settled into place, the English and Dutch began sharing their expertise and taught the North African corsairs how to build, sail, and navigate European-style square-rigged sailing ships. This allowed the North African corsairs to break out of the Mediterranean.

So renegade English and Dutch pirates, now sailing as Barbary corsairs, and North African corsairs newly liberated from the Mediterranean were all looking for a port on the Atlantic coast that they could make use of.

They, along with what were left of the English pirates from al-Ma'mum, ended up in Salé, for it was the only Atlantic port left

The Hornacheros of New Salé welcomed them all. Nursing a fervid desire for vengeance against the Spanish as they did, the Hornacheros saw piracy as a potential means of revenge—and as a way of enriching themselves in the process. With their background in armed robbery, counterfeiting, etc., it would have been a natural choice.

To prosper as a pirate capital, New Salé needed four crucial things: seed money to invest in corsair expeditions, knowledge of sailing and the sea, a fleet of ships, and the necessary international trading networks required to buy and profitably resell stolen pirate booty on a large scale.

The Hornacheros had the money. The influx of pirates and corsairs brought both the sailing know-how and the ships. The black-market merchants from al-Ma'mum provided the beginnings of the necessary trade networks (they were soon joined by other such merchants who flocked to Salé as the place grew).

Moreover, the timing of events was such that all the various elements came together to create a sort of 'perfect storm.' The Hornacheros had arrived at New Salé in 1610, followed not long after by the Andalusians. The influx of English pirates, al-Ma'mura black-market merchants, and Mediterranean-based corsairs followed about five years later. By that time, the *expulsados* were well established and had rebuilt the Qasba and the town and improved the port.

While all this was happening, the chaos of the Moroccan civil war continued to churn destructively. Moulay Zaydan was emerging as the winner of the fratricidal contest for the throne, but it was a Pyrrhic victory. By 1614, he had established control over Marrakesh and the area surrounding that city, but the rest of the country had devolved into violent disorder and confusion. Not only had he been unable to prevent English pirates from making free with the ports of al-Araish and al-Ma'mura; he hadn't been able to prevent the Spanish from taking those same ports.

Thanks to the agreement between Moulay Zaydan and the Hornacheros, Salé was supposed to be loyal

to him, but the Hornacheros had their own plans and exercised a *de facto* independence he could do little to curb.

Thanks to this confluence of events, New Salé now had everything it needed to become a pirate capital.

It did not happen overnight, but once sufficient momentum had built up, the Salé corsair fleet increased rapidly. By the middle 1620s, it numbered around thirty ships.

Thirty ships might not sound like all that much by modern standards, but a fleet of thirty-plus ships in fact represented a major enterprise. Corsair ships tended to have large crews—the better to overwhelm their prey should it prove necessary. Though the Salé ships were relatively small (there was a sand bar across the harbor, which limited the size of ship that could get in), each ship would still likely have had a crew of at least fifty or more. If we use that number (and it is probably an underestimate), a fleet of thirty ships would have required at minimum 1,500 men just to crew it.

This fleet was the economic engine of New Salé. Not only did it require crew; it also required support services, from black market merchants who bought booty to purveyors of gunpowder and shot to carpenters, sailmakers, bakers, and grocers—and, of course, tavern and brothel keepers. In total, as many as 5,000 people or more were likely involved, one way or another, directly or indirectly, with the Salé corsair enterprise. This represented a sizeable portion of the New Salé population, which at this time, remember, was something like 13,000 after the Hornacheros and Andalusians had settle in.

Salé declared total independence from Moulay Zaydan, became a republic, and, for the better part of forty years, served as *the* corsair capital on the Atlantic. Ships operating out of Salé cruised all along the Atlantic littoral of Europe from southern Spain up into the English Channel. They also hunted in the open waters between the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the European coast, raiding those islands and taking ships sailing to and from the new World whenever they could. Once, they even raided as far as Iceland.

In the 1660s, the Dynasty that Mulay Zaydan had struggled so hard to preserve was replaced by a new dynasty and a new Sultanate. The new Sultan rapidly reasserted control of Morocco, including Salé, crushing the town's independent republic and ending its 'wild west' days. Gradually, the river Salé was situated on silted up, and, by the middle of the eighteenth century, the place was pretty much closed as a corsair port.

In its heyday, though, Salé was justly (in)famous.

And all thanks to the intractable Hornacheros, driven from their home, searching for a new place to settle, restless and angry and determined.

The right people—as the saying goes—in the right place at the right time.

The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson

The story of the Barbary corsair raid on Iceland in 1627

Corsairs & Captives

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SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 1

OCTOBER 7, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • BACKGROUND

The city of Salé was a famous corsair capital during the seventeenth century. It was (and still is) actually composed of two settlements that straddle the mouth of the Bou Regreg River, which flows northwestwards from its headwaters in the Middle Atlas Mountains in the interior of Morocco and empties into the Atlantic Ocean about 170 miles (a

RECENT POSTS

- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 2 January 9, 2023
- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 1 January 2, 2023
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 2 December 25, 2022
- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19, 2022

little under 275 kilometers) south of the Strait of Gibraltar. The settlement on the north bank of the river is today known as Salé, that on the south bank as Rabat (now the capital city of Morocco). The twin modern cities are frequently referred to as a single place—Rabat-Salé. Seventeenth century Europeans used the name Salé quite loosely, however, applying it to both towns. Usually, they distinguished between the two by referring to the town on the north bank of the river as Old Salé and that on the south bank as New Salé.

Salé is often described as having been an independent pirate republic. It was, at least for a time. But the phrase "independent pirate republic" conjures up the wrong sort of image. It makes one think of swarms of pirates descending upon Salé, thumbing their collective nose at ineffectual local authorities, and setting up a wild "anything goes" frontier town full of taverns, brothels, and shady merchants, all catering to the pirates and their ill-gotten gold—a Moroccan version of the sort of place people imagine seventeenth century Caribbean pirate havens like Tortuga or Port Royal to have been. The problem with this "independent pirate republic" image is that it totally ignores Moroccan history.

And Moroccan history—like everybody's history—is complicated.

To understand why Salé became the place that it did, it's necessary to know something about the larger context in which Salé existed. It wasn't just an isolated town that sprang up on the seacoast due to a sudden influx of pirates. It had a history, and it played a part in, and was affected by, the larger history of Morocco.

- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022

Early seventeenth century Morocco was not a 'country' in our modern sense of the word. It can indeed be thought of as a distinct geographical territory—bordered on the west by the Atlantic, on the north by the Mediterranean, and on the east and south by shifting boundaries determined by regional allegiances and conflicts—but in the early seventeenth century there was no stable central authority, no national government bureaucracy, no universal rule of law.

It's worth pausing here for a moment to think of just what this means. We modern inhabitants of nation states are so used to stable government structures and bureaucracies, and to the rule of law, that we take such things for granted. They are, however, relatively modern developments, and even today they do not apply in some areas of the world—think Afghanistan or Iraq or Syria, for instance. For much of history, government has been a fragile thing, prey to the vicissitudes of famine, fire, politics, plague, and war.

And so it was in early seventeenth century Morocco.

The Morocco landscape is mountainous, interspersed with fertile plains and numerous river valleys—the kind of geography that tends to create independent tribal groups living in isolated conditions. This rugged, varied territory was inhabited by a variety of peoples: Berbers, Arabs, Andalusians, Jews, and Moriscos.

The Berbers were the indigenous group and had been there for millennia.

The Arabs, as part of the wave of Islam-inspired tribesmen who came boiling out of the Arabian

- November 2022
- October 2022
- September 2022
- August 2022
- July 2022
- June 2022
- May 2022
- April 2022
- March 2022
- February 2022
- January 2022
- December 2021
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- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019
- November 2019
- October 2019
- September 2019
- August 2019

Peninsula, conquered/colonized Morocco starting in the early eighth century.

The Andalusians were refugees from the Spanish *Reconquista*, when the Emirate of Grenada, the last surviving Muslim kingdom in the Iberian Peninsula was overrun by the forces of Queen Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon in 1492.

The Jews were both indigenous and *Reconquista* refugees (as the culminating act of the *Reconquista*, Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the entire population of Iberian Jews from their realms).

The Moriscos were Muslims who had remained in Spain after the *Reconquista*, been made to convert to Christianity, and were then forcibly expelled, in an act of ethnic cleansing, by the Spanish crown in 1609-14.

The Berbers and Arabs, who formed the vast majority of the population, were tribal peoples, many of whom lived in the mountains. The Andalusians, Jews, and Moriscos, who tended to live in the cities, formed tight-knit ethnic groups. Loyalties among these varied peoples were local: family, ethnic group, clan, tribe, coalitions of tribes. Each group—or group of groups—was intent on improving its own position, so there was constant jockeying for power.

European (and Ottoman) outsiders who became involved with Morocco—as is the case today with outsiders in places like Afghanistan—were inevitably sucked into internal power struggles as one tribal or ethnic faction or another sought to use alliances with the foreigners to improve their own positions.

To this complicated dynamic must also be added the religiously based opposition to the European (Christian) colonization—either geographic or economic—of Morocco. Numerous marabouts (holy men) raised armies and launched violent jihads against the Christian infidels. These leaders and their holy wars were woven deep into the fabric of seventeenth century Moroccan power politics.

Fashioning any sort of centralized rule in such a complex, volatile place first required forming a powerful enough coalition of tribes/groups to establish dominance through brute force, and then playing one tribe/group off against another.

Successful Sultans were able to juggle the intricately interlocked pieces of this ethnic/religious/political puzzle in such a way as to create a kind of dynamic equilibrium: the ruling dynasty at the head, negotiating with external European and Ottoman powers, enmeshed in a network of Moroccan tributary allegiances, with each set of players, at every level, acting out of self-interest and so keeping other nearby sets of players in check.

If that complex equilibrium was upset, however, events could quickly spiral into bloody chaos.

In the early 1600s, just such a disequilibrium had occurred, resulting in revolt and civil war—or *al-fitna* as it has been called. (*Fitna* is an Arabic word, used in the Koran in the sense of "trial" or "testing." By extension, it came to be used to describe periods of revolt or civil war.)

Over the centuries, a number of ruling dynasties governed Morocco. During the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries, it was the Sa'adian dynasty's turn to be in power. The Sa'adis

claimed to be sharifs, that is, descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. This claim endowed them with sufficient status to build a coalition of tribes, and so rise to power. By the turn of the seventeenth century, however, the Sa'adis were floundering.

In 1603, the Sa'adi Sultan al-Abbas Ahmad al-Mansur died (of plague), precipitating a brutal struggle for succession between his three sons. The period of *al-fitna* that followed al-Mansur's death lasted over half a century. It destroyed the Sa'adian Dynasty and tore Morocco apart, shredding what infrastructure remained from al-Mansur's reign as rival groups clashed against each other in continuous bloody conflict.

This period of *al-fitna* was so cruelly devastating, in fact, that an early eighteenth century chronicler of Moroccan history described it as dreadful enough to make the hair of a suckling infant turn white.

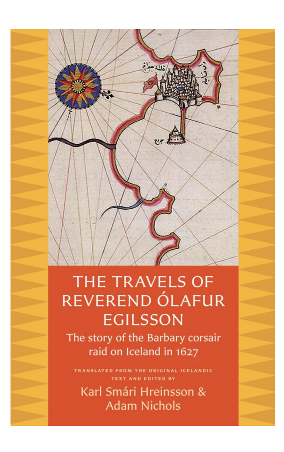
Desperate though the time of *al-fitna* was, the chaos it created also offered up opportunities that might otherwise not have existed. The rulers of the city of Salé availed themselves of just such an opportunity.

For more on all this, see the next post in this series: *Salé, the Turbulent City – Part 2*.

For those who may be interested…

The observation that the Moroccan civil war was "dreadful enough to make the hair of a suckling infant turn white" comes from *Nozhet-Elhâdi: Histoire de la Dynastie Saadienne au Maroc*, *(History of the Sa'adian Dynasty in Morocco*), by Mohammed Esseghir ben Elhadj ben Abdullah Eloufrani, p. 398. The French text (a translation of the original Arabic) reads: "Les

luttes qu'il [Moulay Zaydan] eut à soutenir contre ses frères auraient fait blanchir les cheveux d'un enfant à la mamelle."



« SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 2
EARLY MODERN CURRENCY – PART 2: RANSOMS »

Corsairs & Captives



SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 2

SEPTEMBER 27, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • BACKGROUND

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(This post is a continuation of *Salé, the Turbulent City – Part 1*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read that post before continuing on here.)

Salé became the corsair capital that it did, at the time that it did, in large part because of the Hornacheros.

A series of posts here in this blog back in November 2018 (in the *Corsairs* section) dealt with the Hornacheros in detail, so all we need to say of them here is that they were a group of Moriscos from the town of Hornachos (hence their name), in what is now middle-southwestern Spain, near the border with Portugal. Like tens of thousands of other Moriscos, they were forcibly expelled from Spain in 1610 and ended up in Morocco, homeless.

Sultan Moulay Zaydan was in the middle of a violent struggle with his brother at the time, and he desperately needed allies. He viewed the Hornacheros as exactly the sort of allies he was looking for: foreigners who had no local alliances.

Moulay Zaydan was trying to hold on to Salé, which was a vital port, but he didn't have the manpower needed to garrison it. So he offered Salé as a new home to the Hornacheros—if, in return, they swore loyalty to him.

It was too good an offer to pass up, and so the Hornacheros—about 3,000 of them, men women and some children (many of their young children had been taken from them by the Spanish)—swore to support Moulay Zaydan, packed up their belongings, and made the trek to Salé.

The inhabitants of Old Salé—the town on the north bank of the Bou Regreg River—rejected these



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

newcomers when they arrived. Old Salé had a long tradition of being a religious center and an abode of holy men. Its pious inhabitants viewed the Hornacheros as heretical: they dressed in strange ways, their Arabic was strangely accented and full of odd words, and, since they had come from a Christian country, the genuineness of their Muslim faith was doubtful.

It was made very clear to the Hornacheros that they were not welcome in Old Salé. So they set up in New Salé—which had likely been Moulay Zaydan's plan all along anyway.

When the Hornacheros arrived at the settlement on the south bank of the Bou Regreg, they found the place in ruins. An English merchant who was in Morocco in the 1630s described what it was like there in the late 1500s:

"It was in a manner desolate, abandoned by the Larbyes [local inhabitants] because of wild beasts, for the ruinous castle had become a receptacle for lions, which there bred and terrified the poor peasants, so that they left the place and dwelt in *doars* [tents] in the open fields, less commodious but more secure."

It's not clear whether the Hornacheros actually had to chase off denning lions in order to make a home for themselves, but they certainly had to do some major rebuilding.

The "ruinous castle" the English merchant mentions was a fortress on the edge of the Atlantic. The Hornacheros chose to settle in this fortress, which became known as the Qasba (from Arabic *al-qasaba*, meaning "the town center" and also "the fortress").

ARCHIVES

The south bank of the Bou Regreg where it meets the Atlantic consists of a rocky promontory almost 100 feet (30 meters) high. It is a perfect spot to place a defensive fortification and was used as the site of a *ribāt*—a fortified, garrisoned fortress—early in the twelfth century. At the end of that century, Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Mansur, an Almohad Sultan—the Almohads being one of the various dynasties that, over the centuries, ruled *al-Andalus* (Islamic Spain) and North Africa—began an ambitious building scheme there.

Yaʿqub al-Mansur re-named the place *Ribāt al-Fath* (Citadel of Conquest) and intended to make it his new capital city and to use it as a major base from which to prosecute the holy war against the infidel Spaniards.

His death (in 1199, at the age of fifty-nine) put an abrupt end to it all.

Nevertheless, a lot was still accomplished: the fortress on the promontory was enlarged and strengthened, a large perimeter wall was constructed to enclose the city-to-be, an aqueduct to bring in fresh water was built, and a grand mosque was begun, a mosque that would have been one of the largest (perhaps even *the* largest) in the world at that time if it had been completed.

The city walls—built using innumerable slaves as a labor force—were a thoroughly impressive accomplishment, extending over three miles (about 5 kilometers) in total , averaging 8 feet (2.5 meters) in thickness and 25 feet (7.5 meters) high. But the city that was supposed to fill the space inside those walls was never built. Of the mosque, only the great tower of the minaret—known as Hassan Tower, 144 feet (44 meters) tall—and a series of columns and

- March 2020
- February 2020
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- November 2019
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- June 2019
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- April 2018
- March 2018
- February 2018
- January 2018

barely-begun foundation walls were left remaining. (Astoundingly enough, both Hassan Tower and the Almohad walls can still be seen in Rabat today—see the photos at the end of this post for images of them and of the modern Qasba on the promontory.)

During the centuries after Yaʿqub al-Mansur's death, *Ribāt al-Fath* fell into decay. The population dwindled. Lions took up residence.

In the early 1500s, Leo Africanus observed that the area in and around the Qasba had only two or three streets with a few forlorn shops on them. The large and imposing perimeter walls enclosed mostly fallow fields. The inhabitants lived in constant fear of attack by the Portuguese, who by then were expanding into the South Atlantic. Leo Africanus was moved to close his description of the place with the following: "Comparing the inhabitants' former felicity with the present conditions into which they are fallen, I cannot but greatly lament their miserable case."

Such was the state of things when the Hornacheros took up residence.

The image at the top of this post shows Salé as it was when the Hornacheros first arrived. The view is of Salé as seen from the west, from the sea. On the left is Old Salé on the north bank of the Bou Regreg River. On the other side—the south side—of the river are the Qasba on the promontory and the Almohad walls. Notice how empty the space they enclose is. At the distant end of the enclosed space, you can see Hassan Tower.

To find out how events enabled the Hornacheros to rebuild the ruins and create not only a new town but also a renowned corsair capital, and then an independent republic free from Moulay Zaydan's

rule, see the next post in this series: *Salé, the Turbulent City – Part 3*.

For those who may be interested…

— The quote by the English merchant about lions inhabiting the "ruinous castle" can be found in *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc – première série, archives et bibliothèques d'Angleterre, tome III*, (*The Unpublished Sources of Moroccan History – First Series, Archives and Libraries of England, Volume 3*) edited by Pierre de Cenival and Philippe de Cossé Brissac, p. 475. There were lions in Morocco (Barbary lions, also known as Atlas or North African lions) for a very long time. The Romans trapped them for the gladiatorial games in the Colosseum in Rome. As with many wild predators, however, human settlement tended to displaced them. It is unlikely that the *ribāt* fortress, which, though depopulated, was never fully emptied of inhabitants, ever served as an actual lions' den. However, the English merchant's anecdote is an indication of just how desolate the place must have looked at some point in order to spawn such a story.

— The Qasba, the fortress overlooking the Atlantic on the promontory on the south bank of the Bou Regreg River, started life as a *ribāt*. The *ribāt* system was in place throughout the Muslim world for a long time, from the shores along the coastal frontier of Palestine in the east, to the Atlantic coast of Morocco in the west. It consisted of a series of fortresses whose function was to defend the borders of the *dâr al-Islâm* (the abode of Islam) against incursions by infidel Christians. *Ribāts* were more than just forts, though. Since the battle in defense of Islam was seen as a holy war, they functioned as

collection centers for militia volunteers (*murabitun*) but also as religious centers attracting scholars and holy men.

— Joannes Leo Africanus (John, the Lion of Africa) was born in the Muslim Emirate of Granada, in southern Spain somewhere around 1485 (opinions differ) and died, perhaps in Europe, perhaps in the Maghreb (again, opinions differ), around 1555. He is also alternatively known as Giovanni Leone, Jean d'Afrique, Yuhanna al-Asad al-Gharnati, al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad al-Wazzan al-Zayyati al-Fasi, or just al-Fasi.

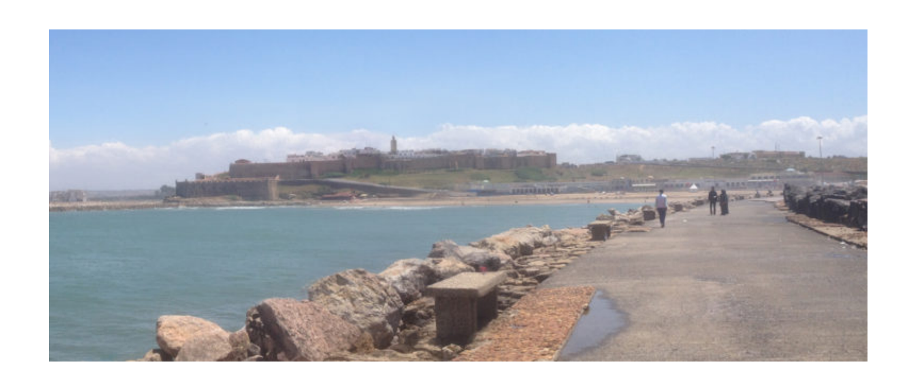
His family emigrated from Granada to Fez, Morocco, where he received a sophisticated university education. As young man, he participated in a variety of commercial and diplomatic missions that allowed him to travel widely throughout North Africa. In 1518, while returning from one of these missions, he was captured by Christian corsairs. Because of his native intelligence and obvious education, he ended up before the Pope in Rome, where he eventually converted to Christianity, learned Italian and Latin, and was given his freedom.

Sometime around 1526, he completed the manuscript of a comprehensive work in which he described the history/geography of the whole of North Africa. In 1550, this was published in Italian under the title *Della descrittione dell'Africa et delle cose notabili che iui sono, per Giovan Lioni Africano (A Description of Africa and the Notable Things There, by John, Lion of African*). In 1556, Latin and French translations were published. In 1600, an English translation appeared. Leo's work was hugely influential and widely read, and remained, for several centuries, the most important source of detail about North Africa available to European readers.

The quote about Salé is taken from a reprint of the 1600 English edition: *A Geographical Historie of Africa, written in Arabicke and Italian. Before which is prefixed a generall description of Africa, and a particular treatise of all the lands undescribed*, translated from the original by John Pory, Vol. II, Book 3, p. 408.

— The image of pre-Hornachero Salé that accompanies this post is taken from *Civitates orbis terrarium* (*Cities of the Terrestrial Globe*), a marvelous book (actually a series of six volumes published between 1572 and 1617) containing over 500 bird's-eye views and maps of cities from all over the then-known world. There are several full color facsimile editions available today at quite reasonable prices.

— Below are some photos of modern-day Rabat.



The Qasba as seen from the sea.



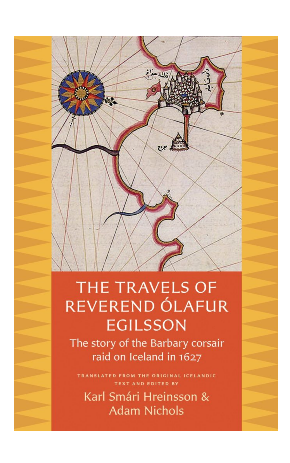
The entrance to the Qasba.



The old Almohad city walls.



Hassan Tower.



« SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 3

SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 1 »

Corsairs & Captives



SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 3

SEPTEMBER 22, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of *Salé, the Turbulent City – Parts 1 & 2*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read those posts before continuing on here.)

Before we can turn to how the Hornacheros rebuilt the ruins of Salé and created not only a new town

but also a renowned corsair capital, and then an independent republic free from Moulay Zaydan's rule, we first have to look at a final sequence of contributing events that occurred out in the larger world.

The Hornacheros were farmers and had no real knowledge of the sea. In order to transform Salé into a corsair center, they needed the sort of expertise that could only be provided by pirates.

As it turned out, exactly the sort of men they needed showed up—from England.

During the last couple of decades of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth, the English and the Spanish were locked in a series of messy conflicts lasting nearly twenty years—1585–1604.

Spain was *the* world power among European nations at the time. The Spanish colonies brought in huge wealth, much of it in the form of silver and gold—and all that wealth had to be shipped across the Atlantic.

The English did their best to intercept that shipping and to harass the Spanish colonies where it originated. Trying to accomplish this presented a problem, however. England had neither the funds nor the naval vessels to properly prosecute the war against Spanish shipping in both the Atlantic and the Caribbean. To solve this problem, they employed privateers.

Privateers were a sort of pirate, but a very special sort. They were private individuals—as opposed to naval personnel—equipped with legal authorization from their government to attack enemy shipping in a time of war.

- ALGIERS – AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 1627 – PART 2 December 12, 2022



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

- Corsairs (83)
- Captives (136)
- Book Recommendations (10)
- Background (34)
- Uncategorized (1)

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022

The cost of equipping a privateering expedition were born entirely by the backers of individual ships, but the profits were split between the private backers and the government. So not only was the English crown able increase the number of armed ships available for the conflict against Spain without having to pay anything, the Crown actually made money.

For nearly twenty years, English privateers hunted successfully throughout an enormous area, ranging from the English Channel down along the Atlantic coasts of Spain and Portugal to Morocco and the west coast of equatorial Africa, across to the northeastern coast of South America and the Spanish Main in the Caribbean, up to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. They gained a vast amount of experience, both as sailors and navigators, and as pirates and men of war.

But then hostilities ended and privateering was banned by royal decree.

Most privateers returned quietly to life as merchant seamen. Some did not, however.

These men changed overnight from legally sanctioned privateers to out-and-out pirates. As a result, they could no longer operate out of English ports and had to find new ones.

Irish ports were the first ones they turned to. Ireland in those days was a sort of maritime 'wild west.' English control was tenuous, small harbors and ports were plentiful, and the local people and their English overlords saw the profit in dealing with pirates, both in victualling their ships and entertaining their crews (who had ready cash to spend) and in buying the stolen goods they offered at cut-rate prices.

The Irish ports didn't last, though, for the English Crown began to assert control over Irish waters.

So the English pirates moved south, and soon they were scattered all across the Maghreb, from Tripoli in the east to Salé in the west. Some began hunting in the Mediterranean. Most, however, stuck with the waters they were familiar with—the Atlantic.

Due to the sustained exploitation of the New World during the sixteenth century, there were large numbers of ships conveying merchandise to and fro across the Atlantic. There was also an increase in secondary shipping rerouting New World wealth. Many of the shipping routes funneled into the bottle neck of the Strait of Gibraltar, either to the Spanish ports near it or to ports beyond it in the Mediterranean. All this shipping provided a continuous and reliable prey population that could support a relatively large number of predatory pirates. Having a base near to it was crucial, however.

The best place for such a base was the Atlantic coast of Morocco.

Many of the ports along that coast, however, were in the hands of the Spanish.

For a while, English pirates made use of two of the last remaining ports not under Spanish control: al-Araish (modern Larache) and al-Ma'mura (modern Mehdya).

Al-Ma'mura in particular was a major operation. The writer of a letter dated 1611 estimates that there was a total of 40 ships and 2,000 English pirates cruising the Atlantic at the time, and that their "common rendezvous" was al-Ma'mura, where there was a large and efficient black market (dominated by

merchants from Livorno, Italy) dealing in the stolen goods the pirates had to offer.

Neither al-Araish nor al-Ma'mura survived very long as pirate ports, though.

In return for providing military aid and funds to al-Ma'mum (one of the brothers Moulay Zaydan was fighting during the *al-fitna* civil war), the Spanish acquired al-Araish in 1610 (the year the Hornacheros came to Morocco). In August of 1614, the Spanish sent a flotilla—an armada, almost—of ninety-nine ships and 5,000 men against al-Ma'mura and took the town.

The 2,000 or so English pirates who had been using al-Ma'mura scattered and took up new residences in various ports. Some of them resettled in Salé, which was far enough south of the Straits of Gibraltar to be beyond Spanish control. They brought with them ships, crews, and expert knowledge of the pirate profession. More importantly perhaps, a sizeable number of the merchants who had been doing a brisk trade in stolen pirate booty in al-Ma'mura resettled in Salé as well, bringing with them both their business acumen and their connections to far-flung commercial networks throughout Europe and the Maghreb.

English pirates were not the only ones to choose Salé as a new base. Dutch pirates—their privateering careers ended by peace treaties with the Spanish, just as the English privateers' had been—also began to gravitate towards Salé. And as the Algerian corsairs broke out into the Atlantic—thanks to the new sailing skills they had learned from English and Dutch renegades—they found it more convenient to sell captives and booty they had taken in the Atlantic at Salé rather than shipping them all the way back to

Algiers. Like the English and Dutch pirates, this new breed of Algiers corsairs brought experience and expertise.

This serendipitous confluence of larger events—the bloody chaos of the Moroccan *al-fitna*, the arrival of the Hornacheros, and the influx of English (and other) pirates—created the conditions that allowed Salé to become a renowned corsair capital.

To see how these various threads came together and how the Hornacheros turned Salé into the (in)famous corsair center and independent republic that it became, see the next post in this series: *Salé, the Turbulent City – Part 4*.

For those who may be interested…

The 1611 letter about the English pirate population at al-Ma'mura can be found in *Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc, première série, archives et bibliothèques d'Angleterre, tome II* (*The Unpublished Sources of Moroccan History, – First Series, Archives and Libraries of England, Volume 2*), edited by Henry de Castries, p. 464.

Here is the full passage:

"They say further that there is in all of this kind of vermin [i.e., pirates] to the number of 40 sail and 2,000 men, all English. Their common rendezvous is at Mamora [al-Ma'mura] in Barbarie, where they have merchants of all sorts that trade with them for all kinds of commodities, especially those of Leghorn [Livorno]."

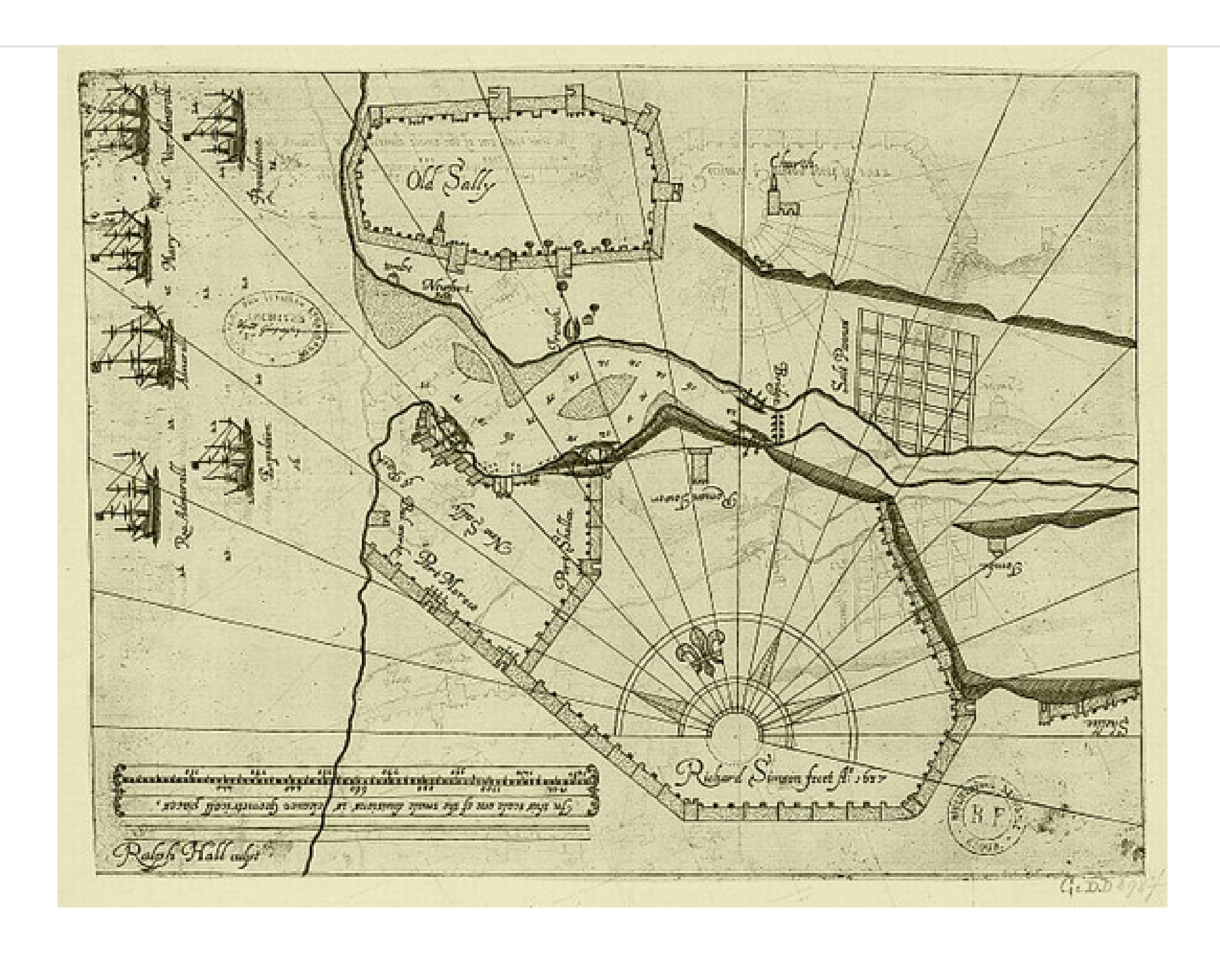
John Harrison, an English envoy in Morocco, had this to say in a report to the Earle of Salisbury dated 1610:

"In Mamora, a harbor of pirates upon the coast of Barbarie, the report is there have come in, at one time, but of late, to the number of twenty-two sails of pirates together with their prizes" (*Les sources inédites de l'histoire du Maroc, première série, archives et bibliothèques d'Angleterre, tome II*, p. 450).

« SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 4

SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 2 »

Corsairs & Captives



SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 4

SEPTEMBER 15, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

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- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 2
January 9, 2023
- THE NARRATIVE OF JOÃO DE CARVALHO MASCARENHAS – PART 1
January 2, 2023

(This post is a continuation of *Salé, the Turbulent City – Parts 1, 2, & 3*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read those posts before continuing on here.)

When the Hornacheros arrived on the south bank of the Bou Regreg River, they must have been severely disappointed to discover that that this new home they had finally reached was a crumbling ruin. They were out of options, though, so they proceeded to rebuild. They chose to settle in Qasba (the *ribāt* fortress on the promontory overlooking the Atlantic), repairing the crumbling walls and constructing over 200 houses, all honeycombed tightly together.

The Hornacheros had been essentially an autonomous community back in Spain, so they were uniquely equipped to set themselves up in their new home. Soon—nobody knows quite how soon—they had a functioning self-ruling government going. They found themselves surrounded on all sides by locals who mistrusted them, however. Perhaps because of this, or perhaps because they simply had grand ambitions for the town they were founding, they sent out the word to other Spanish *expulsados* in Morocco that Salé was a good place to settle. They even helped pay travel expenses for this new batch of settlers.

As usual, it is difficult to come up with precise numbers, but it seems that a total of somewhere around 10,000 made the trip to Salé. To distinguish them from the Hornacheros, these folk are typically referred to as Andalusians—not because they came from what is now the *comunidad autónoma* of Andalusia in Spain, but because they came from *al-Andalus*.



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

There was no possible way for so many new people to crowd into the Qasba, and the Hornacheros no doubt had never intended to share their quarters anyway, so the newcomers set up outside the Qasba but inside the old walls built under the auspices of Ya'qub al-Mansur four centuries before (known as the Almohad walls, since Ya'qub al-Mansur was an Almohad Sultan).

There was already a town of sorts there, but it was little more than a cluster of buildings on the riverfront. The Andalusians spread out from that point, laying out streets and constructing dwellings, filling up a portion of the empty space within the Almohad walls. Eventually, they built a new protective wall for themselves, running from the riverfront to one of the original fortified gateways of the old Almohad wall.

The end result of all this expansion was that New Salé now consisted of two separate sections, each with its own distinct Morisco *expulsado* population.

The Qasba, with its 3,000 Hornacheros, was the seat of government. The Hornacheros had endured enormous hardship to arrive in Salé, and it is easy to sympathize with them, but they were in fact a hardnosed bunch. Back in Hornachos, they had lived as a sort of ruthlessly self-serving *Cosa Nostra*, robbing and murdering travelers, minting counterfeit coins, and bribing state officials. They had not enticed the Andalusians to settle there in order to create an egalitarian utopia. The new town, with its 10,000 or so inhabitants, was relegated to being a vassal state to the Qasba. This was trouble waiting to happen.

In the meantime, though, the town grew.

ARCHIVES

- January 2023
- December 2022
- November 2022
- October 2022
- September 2022
- August 2022
- July 2022
- June 2022
- May 2022
- April 2022
- March 2022
- February 2022
- January 2022
- December 2021
- November 2021
- October 2021
- September 2021
- August 2021
- July 2021
- June 2021
- May 2021
- April 2021
- March 2021
- February 2021
- January 2021
- December 2020
- November 2020
- October 2020
- September 2020
- August 2020
- July 2020
- June 2020
- May 2020
- April 2020
- March 2020
- February 2020
- January 2020
- December 2019

In the map at the top of this post (a map originally drawn in the 1630s), you can see Old Salé ("Old Sally") on the north bank of the Bou Regreg River. On the south bank are the Qasba (the cluster of buildings on the promontory) and New Salé ("new Sally") with its slightly dog-legged protective wall running from the river to the Almohad wall to the south. The map makes it appear as if "New Sally" is devoid of buildings. In fact, it was packed with them, for, remember, it held 10,000 inhabitants.

You can also see just how large a town Ya'qub al-Mansur, the Almohad Sultan, dreamed of: a settlement of something like 13,000 people fills no more than a quarter of the available space inside the Almohad walls. During the early seventeenth century, the rest of that space was empty (just as the map depicts), taken up with crops such as wheat, barley, beans, and grapes. In the 1630s, the New Salé vineyards could produce upwards of 200 tunns (a tunn was about 250 gallons) of wine annually—which no doubt confirmed all the darkest suspicions the pious teatotalling Muslim inhabitants of Old Salé harbored against the *expulsado* newcomers.

Notice, also, the sandbars in the river. Over the centuries, the Bou Regreg River had been—and still is—silting up. In the early seventeenth century, there were large, shifting sandbars across the river mouth where the river met the sea. At low tide, these sandbars were covered by not much more than a foot or two (half a meter of less) of water. Ships could only enter the harbor at high tide, when there was about 10 to 13 feet (3 – 4 meters) of water over the sandbars, depending on the state of the tide. These sandbars limited the size of ships the Salé corsairs could use.

The sandbars at the river's mouth may have been a limitation, but they also proved to be a blessing. The large European warships that periodically arrived to attack Salé could not cross them to enter the harbor and so had to lob cannon fire at the town from a distance. Because the port was tucked up against New Salé on the south bank of the river, it was difficult for European ships out in the roadstead to get a direct line of fire on it. This meant that the port itself—and any ship moored at the docks there—was virtually immune from offshore cannon fire.

As you can also see from the map, the river had silted up in front of Old Salé, and there was no good spot for any sort of harbor there. On the south shore bordering New Salé, however, the water was about 15 to 18 feet (4.5 – 5.5 meters) deep, so once past the sandbars, ships could confidently approach the quays and unload their cargo—both human and otherwise.

The fact that Old Salé had no good harbor meant that they were unable to take advantage of the influx of pirates/corsairs and the wealth they brought in. This was a continuing source of friction between the two towns.

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By the mid 1620's, Salé (New Salé, that is) had become the premier corsair port of the Atlantic.

The town had been rebuilt and repopulated. The Hornacheros had financial resources (they had brought money with them from Spain) and access to manpower (both the Andalusians and the local inhabitants), and both *expulsado* groups were blisteringly eager for revenge against the Spanish, who had taken from them their homes, their young

children, their livelihoods, and whatever original dreams and hopes they might once have had.

Salé's position on the coast was ideal for a corsair base: far enough south of the Strait of Gibraltar—about 170 miles (275 kilometers)—to be beyond the reach of Spanish domination but still close enough to be a practicable location from which to launch raids against European shipping and coastlines.

So Salé had location, a sheltered harbor, financial resources, manpower, markets, and piratical expertise (brought in by English and Dutch pirates and renegades, and North African corsairs).

This chance combination of events and geography meant that Salé was in exactly the right place at exactly the right time to prosper.

And prosper it did.

So much so, that the Hornacheros began to think that they had everything they needed to become independent.

So they broke away from Sultan Moulay Zaydan and announced their existence as a free and independent republic.

To see how that went, see the next post in this series: *Salé, the Turbulent City – Part 5*.

The Travels of Reverend Ólafur Egilsson

Corsairs & Captives

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SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 5

SEPTEMBER 8, 2019 • ADAM NICHOLS • CORSAIRS

(This post is a continuation of *Salé, the Turbulent City – Parts 1, 2, 3, & 4*. If you haven't done so already, it's best to read those posts before continuing on here.)

It is often said that Salé was an independent pirate republic, ruled by a governing council, presided over

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- THE OTHER ARMADA – PART 1 December 19,

by a pirate captain. The reality was something quite different.

First, as should be clear by now, Salé wasn't the sort of wild, anything-goes pirate haven that seventeenth century Caribbean ports such as Tortuga or Port Royal were. And it wasn't any sort of utopian freeport ruled by an egalitarian pirate brotherhood either. Salé did indeed become an independent republic (of sorts), but the driving force behind that independence wasn't pirates—it was the Hornacheros.

The Hornacheros, remember, had settled in New Salé, on the south bank of the Bou Regreg River. They had set themselves up in the Qasba—the fortress on the hill overlooking the mouth of the river—and were in a dominant position geographically. More importantly, they were a self-inclusive group with the ruthless *cosa nostra* clannishness of a crime syndicate combined with a history of effective self-government. And they were ambitious.

Remember, also, that the Hornacheros had entered into a deal with Sultan Moulay Zaydan: he would give them Salé as a home, and they, in turn, would hold it for him and be loyal subjects. They remained loyal for a time, but as they became more settled and secure in their new home, they began to chafe at the demands the Sultan made on them.

Morocco was still caught up in the *al-fitna* chaos that had ensued after the death of Sultan al-Abbas Ahmad al-Mansur in 1603. By the late 1620s, the churning internecine conflict showed no signs of abating.



Seventeenth century Barbary corsair

CATEGORIES

ARCHIVES

So Moulay Zaydan (Al-Mansur's surviving son) needed soldiers. He regarded the Hornacheros as his legitimate subjects and conscripted them into his military forces to fight in his wars. After a time, the Hornacheros decided that such demands were too onerous and refused to comply.

When Moulay Zaydan tried to reassert his authority over them, they resisted. When he pushed harder, they revolted and declared their complete independence from him. Moulay Zaydan's position had been so weakened by the continuing *al-fitna* turmoil that he simply didn't have the necessary brute force at his disposal to prevent the Hornacheros from breaking away.

The Hornacheros also had a European ally: the English.

The Salé corsairs had been raiding the English Channel for years, taking hundreds of Captives every summer (in 1625 alone, they took over 1,200). The English were fed up with this and sent a Special Envoy to Salé to negotiate some sort of peace treaty that would stop the Salé corsairs' depredations. The Envoy's name was John Harrison.

As the official representative of Chares I, the King of England, Harrison had the power to negotiate in the King's name. He offered the Hornacheros the backing of the English in their bid for independence from Moulay Zaydan. The Hornacheros agreed to an allegiance. They even went so far as to offer to become subjects of the English Crown—though this was more likely a political ploy than a genuine offer.

The promise of royal aid that Harrison held out, though, helped give the Hornacheros a sense of the legitimacy of their cause. By the late spring of 1627,

they had officially declared their independence from Moulay Zaydan. According to Harrison, they had a grand notion that they could call together all the *expulsados* in the country and carve out an empire for themselves. It must have been a heady time.

In May of 1627, the Hornacheros of Salé performed their first official act as a republic: they signed a draft treaty with the King of England. In that treaty, they referred to themselves as "the most honorable lords… captains and governors of the powerful town of Rebato [i.e., Salé] and its territories… councilors of the town government, on behalf of all the Andalusian residents of this powerful town." They clearly saw themselves as serious representatives of a serious place.

Moulay Zaydan died in September, 1627. His son, Abd al-Malik, found himself in an even weaker position than his father and was unable to do anything at all about the Hornachero revolt.

So Salé became a fully independent republic.

It was an odd sort of entity, though, existing in a kind of cultural and political bubble on the shore of the Atlantic. Most of the inhabitants of New Salé still spoke Spanish as a first language rather than Arabic, and the town's official language of correspondence was Spanish (the draft treaty with King Charles I was in Spanish).

The Hornacheros formed the government, employing the same sort of Governor/Ruling Council apparatus they had employed back in Hornachos. They had no local alliances and no direct involvement in the ongoing *al-fitna* power struggles. They were more connected to the European nations they

- August 2019
- July 2019
- June 2019
- May 2019
- April 2019
- March 2019
- February 2019
- January 2019
- December 2018
- November 2018
- October 2018
- September 2018
- August 2018
- July 2018
- June 2018
- May 2018
- April 2018
- March 2018
- February 2018
- January 2018

preyed upon—and relied upon for sources of supply —than to any Moroccan powers.

And affairs did not progress smoothly within Salé itself.

The Hornacheros showed no inclination to share power—or revenues. Before they revolted, there had been an official Caïd (Governor) in Salé who represented Sultan Moulay Zaydan, but the Hornacheros ruled the town. They collected—and kept—all the duties and taxes: 20% of the value of all corsair prizes brought into the port plus a customs tax of 5% on all goods and local produce sold in the town. They collected these revenues under the Sultan's official authority, but they never shared any of the money with the Sultan. They never shared any of it with either the Andalusians in the town below the Qasba or with the pious Muslims in Old Salé across the river either. After independence, they continued monopolizing these revenues.

As a result, the Hornacheros grew wealthier and more powerful with each passing year.

The Andalusians, meanwhile, found themselves delegated to the status of second-class citizens. As can be imagined, they were not happy about this. They provided manpower for pirate expeditions and the necessary intelligence for raids along the Spanish coast, and they no doubt must have received some share in the profits of each raid they participated in, but they clearly resented being cut out of the lucrative revenues derived from duties and taxes.

After independence, friction between the Hornacheros and Andalusians grew so severe that it erupted into a series of armed clashes and, eventually, outright civil war. For a time, the

Andalusians ruled in Salé, and the Hornacheros found themselves exiled. Eventually, though, a compromise was reached, and the two factions shared power—though always uneasily.

The inhabitants of Old Salé were equally fed up with the Hornacheros, and the *ulema* of the city declared a *fatwa* against them, accusing the Hornacheros of, among other things, refusing to grant the Muslims of Old Salé the share in the corsair profits that that was rightfully due to them. An ongoing armed conflict erupted between the two cities—Old Salé on the north bank of the river and New Salé (and especially the Qasba) on the south bank—that sputtered on for years.

In fact, the history of the independent republic of New Salé is pretty much a history of one conflict after another, as the town lurched from crisis to crisis, punctuated only briefly by short periods of calm—until, in 1641, as the *al-fitna* chaos continued, a new warlord took control of Old Salé. This warlord was more powerful than any who had preceded him, and he was able to exert enough brute control to take over both towns and settle things down.

And that was the end of Salé as an independent republic. It continued as a corsair port, but it never again quite reached the prominence it once had had.

In 1666, Mulay al-Rashid bin Sharif, the first Alaouite Sultan of Morocco, ascended the throne. He consolidated enough power to be able, finally, to put an end to the *al-fitna* conflict (the Alaouites are still the ruling dynasty in Morocco today). He also put an end to any hopes the Hornacheros of Salé might have had of reasserting their independence.

So the independent republic of Salé lasted for only about fifteen turbulent years. A surprisingly brief time, considering the outsized role the place played in Barbary corsair history.

« THE AFFAIR OF THE VLIEGENDE HERT – PART 1
SALÉ, THE TURBULENT CITY – PART 4 »